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J. Addison Alexander

with the affectionate regards
of his much indebted pupil

Sam^l. B. Jones.

Dec^r 30th 1835

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LECTURES

ON THE

GOSPEL OF ST. MATTHEW;

DELIVERED IN THE

PARISH CHURCH OF ST. JAMES,

WESTMINSTER,

IN THE YEARS 1798, 1799, 1800, AND 1801.



BY THE RIGHT REVEREND

BEILBY PORTEUS, D. D.

BISHOP OF LONDON.

COMPLETE IN ONE VOLUME.

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PREFACE.

AT the time when the following Lectures were first begun, the political, moral, and religious state of this kingdom, wore a very unfavourable aspect, and excited no small degree of uneasiness and alarm in every serious and reflecting mind. The enemies of this country were almost every where triumphant abroad, and its still more formidable enemies at home were indefatigably active in their endeavours to diffuse the poison of disaffection, infidelity, and a contempt of the holy scriptures, through every part of the kingdom, more especially among the lower orders of the people, by the most offensive and impious publications; while at the same time it must be acknowledged, that among too many of the higher classes, there prevailed, in the midst of all our distresses, a spirit of dissipation, profusion, and voluptuous gaiety, ill suited to the gloominess of our situation, and ill calculated to secure to us the protection of Heaven against the various dangers that menaced us on every side. Under these circumstances, it seemed to be the duty of every

friend to religion, morality, good order, and good government, and more especially of the ministers of the gospel, to exert every power and every talent with which God had blessed them, in order to counteract the baneful effects of those pestilential writings which every day issued from the press; to give some check to the growing relaxation of public manners; to state plainly and forcibly the evidences of our faith, and the genuine doctrines of our religion, the true principles of submission to our lawful governors, the mode of conduct in every relation of life which the gospel prescribes to us; and to vindicate the truth, dignity, and divine authority of the sacred writings. All this, after much deliberation, I conceived could in no other way be so effectually done as by having recourse to those writings themselves, by going back to the very fountain of truth and holiness, and by drawing from that sacred source the proofs of its own celestial origin, and all the evangelical virtues springing from it, and branching out into the various duties of civil, social, and domestic life.

The result was, that I resolved on discharging *my* share of these weighty obligations, by giving Lectures on the gospel of St. Matthew, in my own parish church of St. James, Westminster, every Friday in Lent; which, at the same time that it promoted my principal object, might also draw a little more attention to that holy but too much neglected season, which our Church has

very judiciously set apart for the purpose of retirement and recollection, and of giving some little pause and respite to the ceaseless occupations and amusements of a busy and a thoughtless world. I foresaw, however, many difficulties in the undertaking, particularly in drawing together any considerable number of people to a place of public worship, for any length of time, on a common day of the week. But it pleased God to bless the attempt with a degree of success far beyond every thing I could have expected or imagined. And as I have been assured that several even of those amongst my audience, that disbelieved or doubted the truth of Christianity, were impressed with a more favourable opinion both of its evidences and its doctrines, and with a higher veneration for the sacred writings than they had before entertained, I am willing to flatter myself that similar impressions may possibly be made on some of that description, who may chance to cast their eyes on these pages: and that they may also tend in some degree to confirm the faith and invigorate the good resolutions of many sincere believers in the gospel. With this hope I now offer them to the world, and particularly to those whom Providence has placed under my more immediate superintendence, and to whom I am desirous to bequeath this (perhaps) last public testimony of my solicitude for their everlasting welfare. And whatever errors, imperfections, or accidental repetitions (arising from the recurrence of the same subjects in the sacred nar-

rative) the critical reader may discover in this work ; he will, I trust, be disposed to think them entitled to some degree of indulgence, when he reflects that it was not a very easy task to adapt either the matter or the language of such discourses as these to the various characters, conditions, circumstances, capacities, and wants of all those different ranks of people to whom they were addressed ; and when he is also told, that these Lectures were drawn up at a very advanced period of life, and not in the ease and tranquillity of literary retirement, but at short broken intervals of time, such as could be stolen from the incessant occupations of an arduous and laborious station, which would not admit of sufficient leisure for profound research or finished composition.

LIFE

OF

BISHOP PORTEUS.

THIS great and truly pious prelate, whose exemplary conduct, in the station he adorned, may be held up for the imitation of future bishops, was born at York, on the 8th of May, 1731. His parents were natives of Virginia, in North America, and both descended from good families. His mother's name was Jennings; she was said to be distantly related to Sarah Jennings, the wife of John Duke of Marlborough: her father, Colonel Jennings, was the first of the family who settled in Virginia, and for some time acted as deputy-governor of the colony. Mr. Porteus, after having been several years at school at York, was placed at Rippon, under Mr. Hyde; and at an earlier age than is usually the case now, was sent to Christ's College, Cambridge, and admitted a Sizar, where he soon distinguished himself by his proficiency in classical learning.

In 1752, he took his Bachelor's degree, and became a successful candidate for one of the gold medals distributed as the reward of classical literature, instituted by the Duke of Newcastle. On the 14th of March, 1753, he was chosen one of the esquire beadles of the university; an office he resigned on the 3rd July,

1755, and that year took the degree of Master of Arts. About this time he was chosen fellow of his college, and became a resident at Cambridge. At the age of twenty-six he took orders, and was ordained deacon at Buckden, in 1757, by Dr. Thomas, then Bishop of Lincoln. On his return to the university in 1759, he was the successful candidate for the Seaton prize. The subject of the poem was "DEATH," which, perhaps, the recent demise of his father had rendered congenial with his feelings. It exhibits proofs that, with due cultivation, he might have claimed the honours due to a genuine poet. In 1762, he was presented to the rectory of Wittersham, in Kent, by Archbishop Secker, who at the same time appointed him one of his domestic chaplains, when he quitted college to reside at Lambeth.

In March 1764, he was presented by the Archbishop to the rectory of Rucking in Kent, and in October received from the same patron a prebend in the Cathedral Church of Peterborough. On the 13th of May, 1765, he was married by the Archbishop, to Margaret, eldest daughter of Brian Hodgson, Esquire, of Ashbourne in Derbyshire, and in the course of the same year he was presented to the rectory of Hunton. On the 7th July, 1767, the degree of Doctor in Divinity was conferred on him, and in August, on the death of Dr. Denne, he became rector of Lambeth, with which he also held the rectory of Hunton. In August 1768, he lost his patron, Archbishop Secker, who by his will entrusted to him, and his other chaplain Dr. Stinton, the revision and publication of his Lectures on the Catechism, his Manuscript Sermons, &c. This trust was executed in a very satisfactory manner; and, prefixed to the sermons published in 1770, was a very

excellent account of the venerable and deservedly esteemed author.

In 1769, he had the honour of being appointed chaplain to his Majesty; and in 1773, he succeeded Dr. John Hoadley in the mastership of the hospital of St. Cross, near Winchester, an option of Archbishop Secker. At length the time arrived when our author was to be elevated to the episcopal bench. On the advancement of Dr. Markham, in January 1777, to the see of York, Dr. Porteus, by the interposition of the Queen, was promoted to the see of Chester, from whence in November, 1787, on the death of Dr. Lowth, he was advanced to the see of London; and on the 23^d of April, 1789, in obedience to the king's express command, he preached at St. Paul's on the day of thanksgiving for his majesty's recovery.

In February 1798, he commenced these admirable Lectures, which have now been before the public nearly a quarter of a century; and which, for beauty of sentiment, justness of reasoning, and strength of argument, cannot be surpassed. They have, through the divine blessing, tended more during that time to the advancement and stability of our Christian faith, than any work of the kind ever published. The man who can rise from a careful perusal of these Lectures without being convinced of the great truths of our religion, the divinity of our blessed Saviour, is an infidel indeed.

The laudable anxiety evinced by the public of all ranks to attend their delivery, must have been truly gratifying to their amiable author; particularly when convinced that his labours had not been in vain, but were the means of bringing many of his hearers to a just knowledge of those great truths he so zealously inculcated.

This truly Christian prelate, after acquitting himself of all the duties of his station, and leading a most exemplary life, expired at his palace, at Fulham, without a pang or a sigh, on the 13th of May, 1809; and, in obedience to his express directions, his corpse was removed to Sundridge, and there interred in a vault in the church-yard.

The bishop was under the middle size, of a thin and a slender frame, and in his youth is supposed to have been very handsome. In politics he constantly voted with Mr. Pitt, though his religious sentiments were always tolerant. The great feature of his character was benevolence, prompt, active, universal benevolence, founded upon the principles of the Christian religion. Though he was a sound churchman, he was not a bigot; he loved good men of all persuasions, and would often express his full conviction of meeting them in that world where the distinction of churchman and dissenter will be no more known.

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LECTURES.

LECTURE I.

IT being my intention to give from this place, on the Fridays during Lent, a course of Lectures, explanatory and practical, on such parts of scripture as seem to me best calculated to inform the understandings, and affect the hearts of those that hear me, I shall proceed, without further preface, to the execution of a design, in which edification not entertainment, usefulness not novelty, are the objects I have in view; and in which, therefore, I may sometimes perhaps avail myself of the labours of others, when they appear to me better calculated to answer my purpose than any thing I am myself capable of producing.

Although my observations will for the present be confined entirely to the gospel of St. Matthew, and only to certain select parts even of that, yet it may not be improper or unprofitable to introduce these Lectures by a compendious view of the principal contents of those writings which go under the general name of the HOLY SCRIPTURES.

That book which we call THE BIBLE (that is, THE

Book, by way of eminence) although it is comprised in one volume, yet in fact comprehends a great number of different narratives and compositions, written at different times, by different persons, in different languages, and on different subjects. And taking the whole of the collection together, it is an unquestionable truth that there is no one book extant, in any language, or in any country, which can in any degree be compared with it for antiquity, for authority, for the importance, the dignity, the variety, and the curiosity of the matter it contains.

It begins with that great and stupendous event, of all others the earliest and most interesting to the human race, the creation of this world, of the heavens and the earth, of the celestial luminaries, of man, and all the inferior animals, the herbs of the field, the sea and its inhabitants. All this it describes with a brevity and sublimity well suited to the magnitude of the subject, to the dignity of the Almighty Artificer, and unequalled by any other writer. The same wonderful scene is represented by a Roman poet*, who has evidently drawn his materials from the narrative of Moses. But though his description is finely imagined and elegantly wrought up, and embellished with much poetical ornament, yet in true simplicity and grandeur, both of sentiment and of diction, he falls far short of the sacred Historian. LET THERE BE LIGHT: AND THERE WAS LIGHT; is an instance of the sublime, which stands to this day unrivalled in any human composition.

But what is of infinitely greater moment, this history of the creation has settled for ever that most important question, which the ancient sages were never able to

* Ovid.

decide ; from whence and from what causes this world, with all its inhabitants and appendages, drew its origin ; whether from some inexplicable necessity, from a fortuitous concourse of atoms, from an eternal series of causes and effects, or from one supreme, intelligent, self-existing Being, the author of all things, himself without beginning and without end. To this last cause the inspired historian has ascribed the formation of this system ; and by so doing has established that great principle and foundation of all religion and all morality, and the great source of comfort to every human being, *the existence of one God*, the creator and preserver of the world, and the watchful superintendent of all the creatures that he has made.

The sacred history next sets before us the primæval happiness of our first parents in Paradise ; their fall from this blissful state by the wilful transgression of their Maker's command ; the fatal effects of this original violation of duty ; the universal wickedness and corruption it gradually introduced among mankind ; and the signal and tremendous punishment of that wickedness by the Deluge ; the certainty of which is acknowledged by the most ancient writers, and very evident traces of which are to be found at this day in various parts of the globe. It then relates the peopling of the world again by the family of Noah ; the covenant entered into by God with that patriarch ; the relapse of mankind into wickedness ; the calling of Abraham ; and the choice of one family and people, the Israelites (or, as they were afterwards called, the Jews) who were separated from the rest of the world to preserve the knowledge and the worship of a Supreme Being, and the great fundamental doctrine of *THE UNITY* ; while all the rest of mankind, even the wisest

and most learned, were devoted to polytheism and idolatry, and the grossest and most abominable superstitions. It then gives us the history of this people, with their various migrations, revolutions, and principal transactions. It recounts their removal from the Land of Canaan, and their establishment in Ægypt under Joseph: whose history is related in a manner so natural, so interesting, and affecting, that it is impossible for any man of common sensibility to read it without the strongest emotions of tenderness and delight.

In the book of Exodus, we have the deliverance of this people from their bondage in Ægypt, by a series of the most astonishing miracles; and their travels through the wilderness for forty years under the conduct of Moses; during which time (besides many other rules and directions for their moral conduct) they received the Ten Commandments, written on two tables of stone by the finger of God himself, and delivered by him to Moses with the most awful and tremendous solemnity; containing a code of moral law, infinitely superior to any thing known to the rest of mankind in those rude and barbarous ages.

The books of Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, are chiefly occupied with the various other laws, institutions, and regulations, given to this people, respecting their civil government, their moral conduct, their religious duties, and their ceremonial observances.

Among these, the book of Deuteronomy (which concludes what is called the Pentateuch, or five books of Moses) is distinguished above all the rest by a concise and striking recapitulation of the innumerable blessings and mercies which they had received from

God since their departure from Horeb; by strong expostulations on their past rebellious conduct, and their shameful ingratitude for all these distinguishing marks of the divine favour; by many forcible and pathetic exhortations to repentance and obedience in future; by promises of the most substantial rewards, if they returned to their duty; and by denunciations of the severest punishments, if they continued disobedient: and all this delivered in a strain of the most animated, sublime, and commanding eloquence.

The historical books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles, continue the history of the Jewish nation under their leaders, judges, and kings, for near a thousand years; and one of the most prominent and instructive parts of this history is the account given of the life and reign of Solomon, his wealth, his power, and all the glories of his reign; more particularly that noble proof he gave of his piety and munificence, by the construction of that truly magnificent temple which bore his name; the solemn and splendid dedication of this temple to the service of God; and that inimitable prayer which he then offered up to Heaven in the presence of the whole Jewish people; a prayer evidently coming from the heart, sublime, simple, nervous, and pathetic; exhibiting the justest and the warmest sentiments of piety, the most exalted conceptions of the divine nature, and every way equal to the sanctity, the dignity, and the solemnity of the occasion.

Next to these follow the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, which contain the history of the Jews for a considerable period of time after their return from a captivity of seventy years in Babylon, about which time the name of Jews seems first to have been applied to

them. The books of Ruth and Esther are a kind of appendage to the public records, delineating the characters of two very amiable individuals, distinguished by their virtues, and the very interesting incidents which befel them, the one in private, the other in public life, and which were in some degree connected with the honour and prosperity of the nation to which they belonged.

In the book of Job we have the history of a personage of high rank, of remote antiquity, and extraordinary virtues; rendered remarkable by uncommon vicissitudes of fortune, by the most splendid prosperity at one time, by an accumulation of the heaviest calamities at another; conducting himself under the former with moderation, uprightness, and unbounded kindness to the poor; and under the latter, with the most exemplary patience and resignation to the will of Heaven. The composition is throughout the greater part highly poetical and figurative, and exhibits the noblest representations of the Supreme Being and a superintending Providence, together with the most admirable lessons of fortitude and submission to the will of God under the severest afflictions that can befall human nature. The Psalms, which follow this book, are full of such exalted strains of piety and devotion, such beautiful and animated descriptions of the power, the wisdom, the mercy, the goodness of God, that it is impossible for any one to read them without feeling his heart inflamed with the most ardent affection towards the great Creator and Governor of the universe.

The Proverbs of Solomon, which come next in order, contain a variety of very excellent maxims of wisdom, and invaluable rules of life, which have no where been exceeded, except in the New Testament.

They afford us, as they profess to do at their very first outset, “the instruction of wisdom, justice, judgement, and equity. They give subtilty to the simple; to the young man, knowledge and discretion.”

The same may be said of the greater part of the book of Ecclesiastes, which also teaches us to form a just estimate of this world, and its seeming advantages of wealth, honour, power, pleasure, and science.

The prophetical writings present us with the worthiest and most exalted ideas of the Almighty, the justest and purest notions of piety and virtue, the awfulest denunciations against wickedness of every kind, public and private; the most affectionate expostulations, the most inviting promises, and the warmest concern for the public good. And besides all this, they contain a series of predictions relating to our Blessed Lord, in which all the remarkable circumstances of his birth, life, ministry, miracles, doctrines, sufferings, and death, are foretold in so minute and exact a manner (more particularly in the prophecy of Isaiah) that you would almost think they were describing all these things after they had happened, if you did not know that these prophecies were confessedly written many hundred years before Christ came into the world, and were all that time in the possession of the Jews, who were the mortal enemies of Christianity, and therefore would never go about to forge prophecies, which most evidently prove him to be what he professed to be, and what they denied him to be, the Messiah and the Son of God. It is to this part of scripture that our Lord particularly directs our attention, when he says, “Search the scriptures; for they are they that testify of me*.” The testimony he alludes to is that of the pro-

* John v. 39.

phets ; than which no evidence can be more satisfactory and convincing to any one that reads them with care and impartiality, and compares their predictions concerning our Saviour with the history of his life, given us by those who constantly lived and conversed with him. This history we have in the New Testament, in that part of it which goes by the name of the GOSPELS.

It is these that recount those wonderful and important events, with which the Christian religion and the Divine Author of it were introduced into the world, and which have produced so great a change in the principles, the manners, the morals, and the temporal as well as the spiritual condition of mankind. They relate the first appearance of Christ upon earth ; his extraordinary and miraculous birth ; the testimony borne to him by his forerunner John the Baptist ; his temptation in the wilderness ; the opening of his divine commission ; the pure, the perfect, the sublime morality which he taught, especially in his inimitable sermon from the Mount ; the infinite superiority which he showed to every other moral teacher, both in the matter and manner of his discourses : more particularly by crushing vice in its very cradle, in the first risings of wicked desires and propensities in the heart ; by giving a decided preference of the mild, gentle, passive, conciliating virtues, to that violent, vindictive, high-spirited, unforgiving temper, which has been always too much the favourite character of the world ; by requiring us to forgive our very enemies, and to do good to them that hate us ; by excluding from our devotions, our alms, and all our other virtues, all regard to fame, reputation, and applause ; by laying down two great general principles of morality, love to

God and love to mankind, and deducing from thence every other human duty; by conveying his instructions under the easy, familiar, and impressive form of parables, by expressing himself in a tone of dignity and authority unknown before; by exemplifying every virtue that he taught in his own unblemished and perfect life and conversation; and, above all, by adding those awful sanctions, which he alone, of all moral instructors, had the power to hold out, eternal rewards to the virtuous, and eternal punishments to the wicked. The sacred narrative then represents to us the high character he assumed; the claim he made to a divine original; the wonderful miracles he wrought in proof of his divinity; the various prophecies which plainly marked him out as the Messiah, the great deliverer of the Jews; the declarations he made, that he came to offer himself a sacrifice for the sins of all mankind; the cruel indignities, sufferings, and persecutions, to which, in consequence of this great design, he was exposed; the accomplishment of it by the painful and ignominious death to which he submitted; by his resurrection after three days from the grave; by his ascension into heaven; by his sitting there at the right hand of God, and performing the office of a mediator and an intercessor for the sinful sons of men, till he comes a second time in his glory to sit in judgement on all mankind, and decide their final doom of happiness or misery for ever.

These are the momentous, the interesting truths, on which the GOSPELS principally dwell.

The ACTS OF THE APOSTLES continue the history of our religion after our Lord's ascension: the astonishing and rapid propagation of it by a few illiterate tent-makers and fishermen, through almost every part of

the world, “ by demonstration of the spirit and of power ;” without the aid of eloquence or of force, and in opposition to all the authority, all the power, and all the influence, of the opulent and the great.

THE EPISTLES, that is, the letters addressed by the Apostles and their associates to different churches and to particular individuals, contain many admirable rules and directions to the primitive converts ; many affecting exhortations, expostulations, and reproofs ; many explanations and illustrations of the doctrines delivered by our Lord ; together with constant references to facts, circumstances, and events recorded in the gospels and the Acts ; in which we perceive such striking, yet evidently such unpremeditated and undesigned coincidences and agreements between the narratives and the epistles, as form one most conclusive argument for the truth, authenticity, and genuineness of both*.

The sacred volume concludes with the Revelation of St. John, which, under the form of visions, and various symbolical representations, presents to us a prophetic history of the Christian religion in future times, and the various changes, vicissitudes, and revolutions it was to undergo in different ages and countries, to the end of the world†.

Is it possible now to conceive a nobler, a more comprehensive, a more useful scheme of instruction than this ; in which the uniformity and variety, so happily

* See the *Horæ Paulinæ* of Dr. Paley.

† A fuller and more detailed account of the contents of the several Books of Scripture may be found in Mr. Gray's *Key to the Old Testament*, Bp. Percy's *to the New*, and the Bishop of Lincoln's late excellent work on the *Elements of Christian Theology*. That part of it which relates to the scriptures has been lately reprinted, for the accommodation of the public at large, in a duodecimo volume, which I particularly recommend to the attention of my readers.

blended together, give it an inexpressible beauty, and the whole composition plainly proves its author to be divine?

“ The Bible is not indeed (as a great writer observes *) a plan of religion delineated with minute accuracy, to instruct men as in something altogether new, or to excite a vain admiration and applause; but it is somewhat unspeakably more great and noble, comprehending (as we have seen) in the grandest and most magnificent order, along with every essential of that plan, the various dispensations of God to mankind, from the formation of this earth to the consummation of all things. *Other* books may afford as much entertainment and much instruction; may gratify our curiosity, may delight our imagination, may improve our understandings, may calm our passions, may exalt our sentiments, may even improve our hearts. But they have not, they cannot have, that authority in what they affirm, in what they require, in what they promise and threaten, that the scriptures have. There is a peculiar weight and energy in *them*, which is not to be found in any other writings. Their denunciations are more awful, their convictions stronger, their consolations more powerful, their counsels more authentic, their warnings more alarming, their exhortations more penetrating. There are passages in them throughout so sublime, so pathetic, full of such energy and force upon the heart and conscience, yet without the least appearance of labour and study for that purpose; indeed the design of the whole is so noble, so well suited to the sad condition of human kind; the morals have in them such purity and dignity; the doctrines, so many of them above reason, yet so per-

* Archbishop Secker, V. vi.

fectly reconcilable with it; the expression is so majestic, yet familiarized with such easy simplicity, that the more we read and study these writings with pious dispositions and judicious attention, the more we shall see and feel of the hand of God in them*." But that which stamps upon them the highest value, that which renders them, strictly speaking, *inestimable*, and distinguishes them from all other books in the world, is this, that they and they only "*contain the words of eternal life*†." In this respect, every other book, even the noblest compositions of man, must fail us; they cannot give us that which we most want, and what is of infinitely more importance to us than all other things put together, *ETERNAL LIFE*.

This we must look for no where but in scripture. It is there, and there only, that we are informed, from authority, of the immortality of the soul, of a general resurrection from the dead, of a future judgement, of a state of eternal happiness to the good, and of eternal

* That accomplished scholar and distinguished writer, the late Sir William Jones, chief justice of Bengal, at the end of his Bible wrote the following note; which, coming from a man of his profound erudition, and perfect knowledge of the oriental languages, customs, and manners, must be considered as a most powerful testimony, not only to the sublimity, but to the divine inspiration of the sacred writings :

" I have (says he) regularly and attentively read these holy scriptures, and am of opinion, that this volume, independently of its divine origin, contains more true sublimity, more exquisite beauty, more pure morality, more important history, and finer strains both of poetry and eloquence, than can be collected from all other books, in whatever age or language they may have been composed.

" The two parts, of which the scriptures consist, are connected by a chain of compositions, which bear no resemblance, in form or style, to any that can be produced from the stores of Grecian, Persian, or even Arabian learning : the antiquity of those compositions no man doubts; and the unstrained application of them to events long subsequent to their publication, is a solid ground of belief that they are genuine predictions, and consequently inspired."

† John vi. 68.

misery to the bad. It is there we are made acquainted with the fall of our first parents from a state of innocence and happiness; with the guilt, corruption, and misery, which this sad event brought on all their posterity; which, together with their own personal and voluntary transgressions, rendered them obnoxious to God's severest punishments. But, to our inexpressible comfort, we are further told in this divine book, that God is full of mercy, compassion, and goodness; that he is not extreme to mark what is done amiss; that he willeth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness, and save his soul alive. In pity therefore to mankind, he was pleased to provide a remedy for their dreadful state. He was pleased to adopt a measure which should at once satisfy his justice, show his extreme abhorrence of sin, make a sufficient atonement for the sins of the whole world, and release all who accepted the terms proposed to them from the punishment they had deserved. This was nothing less than the death of his Son Jesus Christ, whom he sent into the world to take our nature upon him, to teach us a most holy, pure, and benevolent religion, to reform us both by his precepts and example; and lastly, to die for our sins, and to rise again for our justification. By him and his evangelists and apostles we are assured, that if we sincerely repent of our sins, and firmly believe in him and his gospel, we shall, for the sake of his sufferings and his righteousness, have all our transgressions forgiven and blotted out; shall be *justified*, that is, considered as innocent in the sight of God, shall have the assistance of his Holy Spirit for our future conduct; and if we persevere to the end in an uniform (though, from the infirmity of our nature, imperfect) obedience to all the laws

of Christ, shall, through his merits, be rewarded with everlasting glory in the life to come.

Since then the utility, the absolute necessity of reading the scriptures is so great; since they are not only the best guide you can consult, but the only one that can possibly lead you to heaven; it becomes the indispensable duty of every one of you most carefully and constantly to peruse these sacred oracles, that you may thereby “become perfect, thoroughly furnished to every good work*.” They who have much leisure should employ a considerable share of it in this holy exercise, and even they who are most immersed in business have, or ought to have, the Lord’s Day entirely to spare, and should always employ some part of it (more particularly at this holy season) in reading and meditating on the word of God. By persevering steadily in this practice, any one may, in no great length of time, read the scriptures through, from one end to the other. But in doing this, it will be advisable to begin with the New Testament first, and to read it over most frequently, because it concerns us Christians the most nearly, and explains to us more fully and more clearly the words of eternal life. But after you have once gone regularly through both the Old Testament and the New, it may then be most useful, perhaps, to select out of each such passages as lay before you the great fundamental doctrines, and most essential duties, of your Christian profession; and even amongst these, to dwell the longest on such as express these things in the most awful and striking manner, such as affect and touch you most powerfully, such as make your heart burn within you, and stir up all the pious affections in your soul. But

* 2 Tim. iii. 17.

it will be of little use to *read*, unless at the same time also you *reflect* ; unless you apply what you read to those great purposes which the scriptures were meant to promote, the amendment of your faults, the improvement of your hearts, and the salvation of your souls.

To assist you in this most important and necessary work is the design of these Lectures ; and, in the execution of this design, I shall have these four objects principally in view :

First, To explain and illustrate those passages of holy writ, which are in any degree difficult and obscure.

2dly, To point out, as they occur in the sacred writings, the chief leading fundamental principles and doctrines of the Christian religion.

3dly, To confirm and strengthen your faith, by calling your attention to those strong internal marks of the truth and divine authority of the Christian religion, which present themselves to us in almost every page of the gospel.

4thly, To lay before you the great moral precepts of the gospel, to press them home upon your consciences and your hearts, and render them effectual to the important ends they were intended to serve ; namely, the due government of your passions, the regulation of your conduct, and the attainment of everlasting life.

These are all of them objects of the very last importance ; they are worthy the attention of every human being ; and they will, I think, be better attained by a familiar and practical explanation of the sacred writings, than by any other species of composition whatever.

The plan of instruction adopted by our Blessed Lord was unquestionably the very best that could be devised. It was not a regular system of ethics, delivered in a connected series of dry essays and dissertations, like those of the ancient heathen philosophers; but it consisted of familiar discourses, interesting parables, short sententious maxims, and occasional reflections, arising from the common occurrences of life, and the most obvious appearances of nature. All these various modes of instruction are so judiciously blended and mixed together in the history of our Lord's life and conversation, delivered to us in the gospel (as all the various sorts of pleasing objects are in the unornamented scenes of nature), that they make a much deeper impression both on the understanding and on the heart, than they could possibly do in any other more artificial form.

An exposition of scripture, then, must at all times be highly useful and interesting to every sincere disciple of Christ; but must be peculiarly so at the present moment, when so much pains have been taken to ridicule and revile the sacred writings, to subvert the very foundations of our faith, and to poison the minds of all ranks of people, but especially the middling and the lower classes, by the most impious and blasphemous publications that ever disgraced any Christian country*. To resist these wicked attempts is the duty of every minister of the gospel; and as I have strongly exhorted all those who are under my superintendence, to exert themselves with zeal and with vigour in defence of their insulted

* About this time, and for some years before, *The Age of Reason*, and other pestilent writings of the same nature, were disseminated through almost every district of this country with incredible industry.

religion, I think it incumbent on me to take my share in this important contest, and to show that I wish not to throw burdens on others of which I am not willing to bear my full proportion. As long therefore as my health, and the various duties of an extensive and populous diocese, will permit, and the exigencies of the times require such exertions, I propose to continue annually these Lectures. And I shall think it no unbecoming conclusion of my life, if these labours of my declining years should tend in any degree to render the holy scriptures more clear and intelligible, more useful and delightful; if they shall confirm the faith, reform the manners, console and revive the hearts of those who hear me; and vindicate the honour of our Divine Master from those gross indignities and insults, which have of late been so indecently and impiously thrown on him and his religion.

LECTURE II.

MATTHEW II.

HAVING, in the preceding Lecture, taken a short comprehensive view of the several books of the sacred volume, I now proceed to the gospel of St. Matthew; and shall in this Lecture confine myself to the two first chapters of that book*.

The history of our Saviour's birth, life, doctrines, precepts, and miracles, is contained in four books or narratives called gospels, written at different times, and by four different persons, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, who were among the first converts to Christianity, and perfectly well acquainted with the facts they relate: to which, two of them were eye-witnesses, and the other two constant companions of those who were so, from whom they received immediately every thing they relate. This is better authority for the truth of these histories than we have for the greater part of the histories now extant, the fidelity of which we do not in the least question. For few of our best histories, either ancient or modern, were written by persons who were eye-witnesses of all the transactions which they relate;

* For some very valuable observations in some parts of this, and the third and thirteenth Lecture, I am indebted to my late excellent friend and patron, Archbishop Secker.

and there is scarce any instance of the history of the same person being written by four different contemporary historians, all perfectly agreeing in the main articles, and differing only in a few minute particulars of no moment. This, however, we find actually done in the life of Jesus, which has been written by each of the four evangelists, and it is a very strong proof of their veracity. For let us consider what the case is, at this very day, in the affairs of common life. When four different persons are called upon in a court of justice to prove the reality of any particular fact that happened twenty or thirty years ago, what is the sort of evidence which they usually give? Why, in all the great leading circumstances, which tend to establish the fact in question, they in general perfectly agree. In a few other points, perhaps, they differ. But then these are points which do not at all affect the main question, which were too trifling to make much impression at the time on the memory of the observers, and which therefore they would all relate with some little variation in their account. This is precisely the case with the writers of the four gospels; and this substantial coincidence and accidental variation has much more the air and garb of truth than where there is a perfect agreement in every the minutest article; which has too much the appearance of a concerted story.

That the books which we now have under the names of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, were written by the persons whose names they bear, cannot admit the smallest doubt with any unprejudiced mind. They have been acknowledged as such by every Christian church in every age, from the

time of our Saviour to this moment. There are allusions to them, or quotations from them, in the earliest writers, as far back as the age of the apostles, and continued down in a regular succession to the present hour; a proof of authenticity which scarce any other ancient book in the world can produce. They were received as genuine histories, not only by the first Christians, but by the first *enemies* of Christianity, and their authority was never questioned, either by the ancient heathens or Jews*.

The first of these gospels is that of St. Matthew. It was written probably at the latest not more than fifteen years, some think only eight years, after our Lord's ascension. The author of it was an apostle and constant companion of Jesus, and of course an eye-witness of every thing he relates. He was called by our blessed Lord from a most lucrative occupation, that of a collector of the public revenue, to be one of his disciples and friends; a call which he immediately obeyed, relinquishing every thing that was dear and valuable to him in the present life. This is a sacrifice which few people have made for the sake of religion, and had St. Matthew's object been the applause of men, he might have displayed the merits of this sacrifice in a light very favourable to himself. But the apostle, conscious of much nobler views, describes this transaction in the simplest and most artless words. "As Jesus," says he, "passed forth from thence, he saw a man

* Whoever wishes for further satisfaction on this most important subject, will not fail of finding it in Dr. Lardner's learned work, *The Credibility of the Gospel History*, where this question has been very ably treated, and the authenticity of the gospels established on the most solid grounds.

named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom, and he saith unto him, Follow me: and he arose and followed him."

The first thing that occurs in the gospel of St. Matthew, is the genealogy of Christ, in order to prove that he was descended from the house and family of David, as the prophets foretold he should be.

In this genealogy there are confessedly some difficulties, at which we cannot be much surprised, when we consider of what prodigious antiquity this genealogy is, going back some thousands of years; and when we know too that several Jewish persons had the same name, and that the same person had different names, (especially under the Babylonish captivity,) which is still the case in India and other parts of Asia. This must necessarily create some perplexity, especially at such a distance as we are from the first sources of information. But to the Jews themselves at the time, there were probably no difficulties at all; and it does not appear that they (who were certainly the best judges of the question) made any objection to this genealogy of Christ; or denied him to be descended from the family of David. We may therefore reasonably conclude, that his descent was originally admitted to be fairly made out by the evangelists, whatever obscurities may have arisen since. Indeed it is highly probable, that this genealogy was taken from some public records or registers of the ancient Jewish families, which it is very evident from Josephus that the Jews had, especially with regard to the lineage of David, and which were universally known and acknowledged to be authentic documents.

I shall therefore only observe further on this head, that St. Matthew gives the pedigree of Joseph, and St. Luke that of Mary. But they both come to the same thing, because among the Jews the pedigree of the husband was considered as the *legal* pedigree of the wife; and as Mary and Joseph were nearly related, and were of the same tribe and family, their genealogies of course must run nearly in the same line.

After the genealogy of Christ, follows an account of his birth, which, as we may easily suppose of so extraordinary a person, had something in it very extraordinary. Accordingly the evangelist tells us, that “the angel of the Lord appeared unto Joseph in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost: and she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS (that is, a Saviour;) for he shall save his people from their sins*.”

This undoubtedly was a most wonderful and singular and unexampled event. But it was natural to imagine, that when the Son of God was to appear upon the scene, he would enter upon it in a way somewhat different from the sons of men. And in fact we find him appearing upon earth in a manner perfectly new and peculiar to himself; in a manner, which united in itself at once the evidence of prophecy and of miracle. He was born of a virgin, and, what is no less wonderful, it was predicted of him seven hundred years before, that he should be so born. “Behold,” says Isaiah, “a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name

* Matt. i. 20.

Immanuel*;" a Hebrew word, signifying *God with us*. What man, but a prophet, inspired of God, could have foreseen an event so completely improbable, and apparently impossible? What impostor would have hazarded such a prediction as this? and, what is of still more importance, what impostor could have fulfilled it? What less than the power of God could have enabled Jesus to fulfil it? By that power he did fulfil it. He only of the whole human race did fulfil it, and thus proved himself to be, at the very moment of his birth, what the whole course of his future life, his death, his resurrection, and his ascension into heaven, further declared him to be, **THE SON OF GOD**.

And as such he was soon acknowledged, and due homage paid to his divinity by a very singular embassy, and in a very singular manner. For the evangelist proceeds to tell us, in the beginning of the second chapter, that "when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him." As this is a very remarkable, and very important event, I shall employ the remaining part of this Lecture in explaining it to you at large, subjoining such reflections as naturally arise from it.

The name of these persons, whom our translation calls *wise men*, is in the original *μαγοι*, in the Latin language *magi*, from whence is derived our English word, magicians. The magi were a sect of ancient philosophers, living in the eastern part of the world, collected together in colleges, addicted to the study of astronomy, and other parts of natural philosophy,

* Isaiah, vii. 14.

and highly esteemed throughout the east, having juster sentiments of God and his worship than any of the ancient heathens; for they abhorred the adoration of images made in the form of men and animals, and though they *did* represent the Deity under the symbol of fire (the purest and most active of all material substances) yet they worshipped *one only God*: and so blameless did their studies and their religion appear to be, that the prophet Daniel, scrupulous as he was, to the hazard of his life, with respect to the Jewish religion, did not refuse to accept the office which Nebuchadnezzar gave him, of being master of the magi, and chief governor over all the wise men of Babylon*. They were therefore evidently the fittest of all the ancient heathens to have the first knowledge of the Son of God, and of salvation by him imparted to them.

The country from whence they came, is only described in St. Matthew as lying east from Judea, and therefore might be either Persia, where the principal residence of the magi was, or else Arabia, to which ancient authors say they did, and undoubtedly they easily might, extend themselves, which, it is well known, abounded in the valuable things that their presents consisted of; and concerning which the seventy-second psalm (plainly speaking of the Messiah) says, "The kings of Arabia and Saba (or Sabæa, an adjoining region) shall bring gifts;" and again, "unto him shall be given of the gold of Arabia."

Supposing this prophecy of the Psalmist to point out the persons whose journey the evangelist relates, it will also determine what their station or rank in life was, namely, *kings*, "the kings of Arabia and Saba." Of

* Vide Dan. v. 11.

this circumstance St. Matthew says nothing directly, but their offerings are a sufficient evidence that their condition could not be a mean one: and though there is certainly no proof, there is on the other hand no improbability, of their being lords of small sovereignties, which might afford them a claim, according to the ancient usage of that part of the world, to the name of kings. For we read in scripture not only of some small* towns or tracts that had each of them their king, but of some also which could not be very large, that had each of them several †.

What number of the wise men or magi came to our Lord, is entirely unknown, and perhaps that of three was imagined for no other reason, than because the gifts which they brought were of three sorts. The occasion of their coming is expressed by St. Matthew in their own words: “Where is He that is born king of the Jews? for we are come to worship him.”

That a very extraordinary person was to appear under this character about that time, was a very general persuasion throughout the east; as not only Jewish but heathen writers tell us, in conformity with the New Testament. And that this person was to have dominion over the whole earth, was part of that persuasion, founded on predictions of the clearest import. I need produce but one, from the above-mentioned 72d Psalm, which, as I before observed, plainly relates to Christ. “All kings shall fall down before him; all nations shall do him service.” There were Jews enow even in Persia, and much more in Arabia, to propagate this doctrine, and show it to be contained in their sacred books; from whence therefore the wise men may well be supposed to have received it.

* Josh. x. 5.

† Jerem. xxv. 20—26.

But their knowledge that he was actually born, must stand on some other foundation; and what that was, themselves declare, “ We have seen his star in the east*.” This must plainly mean some new appearance in the sky, which they, whose profession (as is well known) led them peculiarly to the study of astronomy, had observed in the heavens. Now any appearance of a body of light in the air is called by the Greek and Latin authors a *star*, though it be only a *meteor*, that is, a transient accidental luminous vapour, neither of considerable height, nor long continuance; in which sense also the scripture speaks of *stars falling from heaven*†. And such was that which the wise men saw, as will appear from a circumstance to be mentioned hereafter. Possibly indeed the first light which surprised them might be that mentioned by St. Luke, when the *glory of the Lord* descending from heaven, shone round about the shepherds, and his angel came upon them, to bring them the news of our Saviour’s nativity‡. For that glory, seen at a distance, might have the appearance of a star; and their seeing the star in *the east*, is not to be understood as if they saw it to the eastward of themselves; but means, that they being eastward of Judea, saw the star, seeming probably to hang over that country.

Now such an uncommon sight alone, supposing their expectation of him raised (as there was then a general expectation of him) might naturally incline them to think he was come, and especially as it was a current opinion amongst persons professing skill in these matters, that the shining forth of a new star denoted the rise of a new kingdom, or of a great and extraordinary

* Matt. ii. 2.

† Matt. xxiv. 29. Mark xiii. 25.

‡ Luke ii. 9.

prince; whence, as Pliny relates*, Augustus the Roman emperor said, that the comet which appeared on Cæsar's death, whom he succeeded, was born for him, and that he was born in that comet; for so it seems he expressed himself.

This, I say, being a current opinion, the wise men would be apt enough to conclude, that the present star betokened the birth of that Prince, of whom (as they might easily have heard) it had been so very long foretold, "There shall come a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel †." And it is a very remarkable circumstance, that one of the ancient commentators on the Timæus of Plato ‡, alluding to this very star, expresses himself in these words: "There is a still more venerable and sacred tradition, which relates, that by the rising of a certain uncommon star, was foretold, not diseases or deaths, but the descent of an adorable God for the salvation of the human race, and the melioration of human affairs; which star, they say, was observed by the Chaldeans, who came to present their offerings to the new-born God §."

On their arrival at Jerusalem, and making the inquiry they came for, Herod we find was *troubled*, and all Jerusalem with him. That so jealous a tyrant as Herod should be *troubled* at this event is no wonder; and it is no less natural that the people also should be disturbed and alarmed, not knowing what the consequences of so extraordinary a birth might be. Herod, therefore, calls the chief priests and scribes together, and demands of them, whether it were known where THE CHRIST should be born; and having learnt from them, that, according to the prophet Micah, Bethlehem

* Vide Plin. Nat. Hist. L. ii. Ch. 25. † Numbers xxiv. 17. ‡ Chalceidius.

§ See Brucker's History of Philosophy, v. iii. p. 472.

was the place appointed by Heaven, sends the wise men thither with a request that they would inform him when they had found the child, that he also might go and pay him due homage, intending all the while to destroy him, when he had obtained the requisite intelligence. Accordingly the wise men proceeded on their journey from Jerusalem to Bethlehem; when the same luminous appearance, which they had observed in their own country, now attended them again, to their very great joy, and conducted them at length to the very house where the child was; which probably (as is common in villages) had no other house contiguous to it, and therefore might be easily marked by the situation of the meteor.

When the wise men came into the house and saw the child, they fell down and worshipped him, that is, bowed and prostrated themselves before him, in the eastern manner of doing obeisance to kings. Whether they designed also paying him religious adoration, or how distinct a knowledge had been given them of the nature and rank of the Saviour of the world, we cannot say; but may be sure, that what they believed and what they did was at that time sufficient to procure them acceptance with God. Indeed, according to the opinion of some ancient fathers concerning their presents, their faith must have been very great. For they represent the incense, as offered to our Saviour as God; the gold to have been paid as tribute to a king; and the myrrh (a principal ingredient used in embalming) brought as an acknowledgment that he was to die for men. But others interpret the same gifts very differently, and take them to signify the three spiritual offerings, which we must all present to Heaven, through Jesus Christ; the incense, to denote piety towards God; the

gold, charity towards our fellow-creatures; and the myrrh, purity of soul and body; it being highly efficacious in preserving them from corruption. But though either or both these notions may be piously and innocently entertained, yet all we know with certainty is, that in those parts of the world no one did then or does now appear before a prince, without a suitable present, usually of the most valuable commodities of his country; and that three of the principal productions of the east, particularly of Arabia, were gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

How the wise men were affected with the sight of so unspeakably important a person, in such mean circumstances; or Joseph and Mary, and all that must flock around them, with so humble an address from strangers of such high dignity; and what further passed in consequence of this on either side, every one may in some degree imagine; but no one can undertake to relate, since the gospels do not. We are there only told, that these respectable visitors, having paid their duty in this manner, and being warned of God not to return to Herod*, “departed into their own country another way.”

Thus ends this remarkable piece of history, in which all the circumstances are so perfectly conformable to the manners, the customs, the prevailing opinions and notions of those times in which the narrative is supposed to have been written, that they tend greatly to confirm the truth and credibility of the sacred history. I have already in going along touched slightly on some of these circumstances, but it may be useful here to draw them all into one point of view.

1. In the first place, then, the journey of these wise

* Matt. ii. 12.

men, and the object of it, namely, to find out him who was born king of the Jews, corresponds exactly to the information given by several heathen authors*, that there was in those days a general expectation of some very extraordinary personage, who was to make his appearance at that particular period of time, and in that particular part of the world.

2. If the birth of this extraordinary personage was marked by a new star or meteor in the heavens, it was very natural that it should first strike the observation of those called the *wise men*, who lived in a country where the stars and the planets shone with uncommon lustre, where the science of astronomy was (for that reason perhaps) particularly cultivated, where it was the peculiar profession of these very magi, or wise men, and where no remarkable appearance in the heavens could escape the many curious eyes that were constantly fixed upon them.

3. The *manner* in which these wise men approached our Lord, is precisely that in which the people always addressed themselves to men of high rank and dignity.

They *worshipped* him; that is, they prostrated themselves to the ground before him; which we know was then and still is the custom of those countries.

They *offered presents* to him: and it is well known, that without a present no great man was at that time or is now approached.

These presents were gold, frankincense, and myrrh; and these, as we have before observed, were the natural productions of that country whence the wise men are supposed to have come, namely, Arabia or Sabæa.

Even that dreadful transaction, which was the un-

* Vide Tacit. Hist. v. 13. Sueton. in Vita Vesp. c. 4.

fortunate consequence of their journey, the murder of the Innocents, exactly corresponds with the character of Herod, who was one of the most cruel and ferocious tyrants that ever disgraced a throne, and amongst other horrible barbarities had put to death a son of his own. No wonder, then, that his jealousy should prompt him to murder a number of infants not at all related to him.

All these circumstances concur to prove, that the sacred historians lived in the times and the countries in which they are supposed to have written the gospels, and were perfectly well acquainted with every thing they relate. Had not this been the case, they must have been detected in an error, in some of the many incidents they touched upon; which yet has never happened.

4. It is also, in the last place, worthy of remark, that every thing is here related with the greatest plainness, brevity, and simplicity, without any of that ostentation and parade which we so often meet with in other authors. Thus, for instance, a heathen writer would have put a long and eloquent speech into the mouth of the wise men, and would have provided the parents of the infant with a suitable answer. He would have painted the massacre of the infants in the most dreadful colours, and would have drawn a most affecting picture of the distress and agony of their afflicted parents. But the evangelists have not enlarged on these, or any other similar topics. They have contented themselves with telling their story concisely and coldly, with a bare simple recital of the facts, without attempting to work upon the passions, or excite the admiration of their readers.

received him out of their sight*.” There, we are told, he sitteth at the right hand of God, making intercession for the sinful race of man, till he comes a second time in the glory of his Father, with all his holy angels, to judge the world. There has God “highly exalted him above all principalities and power, and might and dominion, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father†.”

When all these circumstances are taken together, what a magnificent idea do they present to us of the humble Jesus, and how does all earthly splendour fade and die away under this overbearing effulgence of celestial glory! We need not then be ashamed either of the birth, the life, or the death of Christ, “for they are the power of God unto salvation.” And if the great and the wise men, whose history we have been considering, were induced, by the appearance of a new star, to search out, with no small labour and fatigue, the infant Saviour of the world; if they, though philosophers and deists (far different from the philosophers and deists of the present day) disdained not to prostrate themselves before him, and present to him the richest and the choicest gifts they had to offer; well may we, when this child of the Most High is not only grown to maturity, but has lived, and died, and risen again for us, and is now set down at the right hand of God (angels and principalities and powers being made subject to him); well may we not only pay our homage, but our adoration to the Son of God, and

* Matt. xxviii. 18. Luke xxiv. 51.

† Philipp. ii. 9—11.

offer to him oblations far more precious than gold, frankincense, and myrrh; namely, ourselves, our souls and our bodies, “as a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto him;” well may we join with that innumerable multitude in heaven, which is continually praising him and saying; “Blessing, and honour, and glory be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.*”

* Rev. v. 13.

LECTURE III.

MATTHEW III.

THE subject of this Lecture will be the third chapter of St. Matthew, in which we have the history of a very extraordinary person called JOHN THE BAPTIST; to distinguish him from another John mentioned in the New Testament, who was our Saviour's beloved disciple, and the author of the gospel that bears his name; whence he is called JOHN THE EVANGELIST.

As the character of John the Baptist is in many respects a very remarkable one, and his appearance bears a strong testimony to the divine mission of Christ and the truth of his religion, I shall enter pretty much at large into the particulars of his history, as they are to be found not only in the gospel of St. Matthew, but in the other three Evangelists; collecting from each all the material circumstances of his life, from the time of his first appearance in the wilderness to his murder by Herod.

St. Matthew's account of him is as follows: "In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, *Repent ye*, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair,

and a leathern girdle about his loins, and his meat was locusts and wild honey. And there went out to him Jerusalem and all Judea, and all the regions round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan confessing their sins*.”

Here then we have a person, who appears to have been sent into the world, on purpose to be the precursor of our Lord, to prepare the way for him and his religion, here called the *kingdom of heaven*, and, as the prophet expresses it, to *make his paths straight*. This is a plain allusion to the custom that prevailed in eastern countries, of sending messengers and pioneers to make the ways level and straight before kings and princes, and other great men, when they passed through the country with large retinues, and with great pomp and magnificence. They literally lowered mountains, they raised valleys, they cut down woods, they removed all obstacles, they cleared away all roughnesses and inequalities, and made every thing smooth and plain and commodious for the great personage whom they preceded.

In the same manner was John the Baptist in a spiritual sense *to go before the Lord*, before the Saviour of the world, to prepare his way, to make his paths straight, to remove out of the minds of men every thing that opposed itself to the admission of divine truth, all prejudice, blindness, pride, obstinacy, self-conceit, vanity, and vain philosophy; but, above all, to subdue and regulate those depraved affections, appetites, passions, and inveterate habits of wickedness, which are the grand obstacles to conversion and the reception of the word of God.

His exhortation therefore was, “*Repent ye;*” re-

* Matt. iii. 1. 6.

nounce those vices and abominations which at present blind your eyes, and cloud your understandings, and then you will be able to see the truth and bear the light. This was the method which John took, the instrument he made use of to extirpate out of the minds of his hearers all impediments to the march of the gospel, or, as the prophetic language most sublimely expresses it, “*He cried aloud to them, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight the highway for our God. Let every valley be exalted, and every mountain and hill be made low; let the crooked be made straight, and the rough places plain; and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it.”

What a magnificent preparation is this for the great Founder of our religion! What an exalted idea must it give us of his dignity and importance, to have a forerunner and a harbinger such as John to proclaim his approach to the world, and call upon all mankind to attend to him! It was a distinction peculiar and appropriate to him. Neither Moses nor any of the prophets can boast this mark of honour. It was reserved for the Son of God, the Messiah, the Redeemer of mankind, and was well suited to the transcendent dignity of his person, and the grandeur of his design.

The place which St. John chose for the exercise of his ministry was the wilderness of Judea, where he seems to have lived constantly from his birth to the time of his preaching; for St. Luke informs us†, that “he was in the wilderness till the time of his showing unto Israel.” Here it appears he lived with great austerity. For he drank neither wine nor strong drink; a rule frequently observed by the Jews, when

* Isaiah, xl. 3. 5.

† Luke i. 80.

they devoted themselves to the stricter exercises of religion. And his meat was locusts and wild honey : such simple food as the desert afforded to the lowest of its inhabitants. For eating some sorts of locusts was not only permitted by the law of Moses, but, as travellers inform us, is common in the east to this day. The clothing of the Baptist was no less simple than his diet. His raiment, we are told, was of camel's hair, with a leathern girdle about his loins ; the same coarse habit which the meaner people usually wore, and which sometimes even the rich assumed as a garb of mourning. For this raiment of *camel's hair* was nothing else than that *sackcloth* which we so often read of in scripture. And as almost every thing of moment was, in those nations and those times, expressed by visible signs as well as by words, the prophets also were generally clothed in this dress, because one principal branch of their office was to call upon men to *mourn* for their sins. And particularly Elias or Elijah is described in the second book of Kings as a *hairy man**, that is, a man clothed in haircloth, or sackcloth (as John was) with a leathern girdle about his loins. Even in outward *appearance* therefore John was another Elias ; but much more so as he was endued, according to the angel's prediction, with the *spirit* and *power* of Elias†. Both rose up among the Jews in times of universal corruption ; both were authorized to denounce speedy vengeance from heaven, unless they repented ; both executed their commission with the same intrepid zeal ; both were persecuted for it : yet nothing deterred either Elias from accusing Ahab to his face, or John from rebuking Herod in the same undaunted manner.

* 2 Kings i. 8.

† Luke i. 17.

But here an apparent difficulty occurs, and the sacred writers are charged with making our Lord and St. John flatly contradict each other.

When the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask John who he was, and particularly whether he was *Elias*; his answer was, *I am not**: But yet our Lord told the Jews that John *was* the *Elias* which was to come†. How is this contradiction to be reconciled? Without any kind of difficulty. The Jews had an expectation, founded on a literal interpretation of the prophet Malachi‡, that before the Messiah came, that very same *Elias* or *Elijah*, who lived and prophesied in the time of Ahab, would rise from the dead and appear again upon earth. John therefore might very truly say that he was not *that* *Elias*. But yet as we have seen that he resembled *Elias* in many striking particulars; as the angel told Zacharias that he should come in the *spirit* and *power* of *Elias*; and as he actually approved himself, in the turn and manner of his life, in his doctrine, and his conduct, the very same man to the latter Jews, which the other had been to the former, our Saviour might with equal truth assure his disciples that John *was* that *Elias*, whose coming the prophet Malachi had in a *figurative* sense foretold. This difficulty we see is so easily removed, that I should not have thought it worth noticing in this place, had it not been very lately revived with much parade in one of those coarse and blasphemous publications which have been dispersed in this country with so much activity, in order to disseminate vulgar infidelity among the lower orders of people, but which are now

* John i. 21.

† Matt. xi 14.

‡ Malachi, iv. 5.

sinking fast into oblivion and contempt. This is one specimen of what they call their *arguments* against Christianity, and from this specimen you will judge of all the rest. But to return.

The abstemiousness and rigour of the Baptist's life was calculated to produce very important effects. It was fitted to excite great attention and reverence in the minds of his hearers. It was well suited to the doctrine he was to preach, that of *repentance and contrition*; to the seriousness he wished to inspire, and to the terror which he was appointed to impress on impenitent offenders. And perhaps it was further designed to intimate the need there often is of harsh restraints in the *beginning* of virtue, as the easy familiarity of our Lord's manner and behaviour exhibits the delightful freedom which attends the *perfection* of it. At least, placing these two characters in view of the world, so near to each other, must teach men this very instructive lesson; that though severity of conduct may, in various cases, be both prudent and necessary, yet the mildest and cheerfullest goodness is the completest; and they the most useful to religion, who are able to converse among sinners without risking their innocence, as discreet physicians do among the sick, without endangering their health.

It is remarkable, however, that whatever mortifications John practised himself, it does not appear that he prescribed any thing to others beyond the ordinary duties of a good life. His disciples, indeed, fasted often, and so did many of the Jews besides; probably therefore, the former as well as the latter, by their own choice. His general injunction was only *,

* Matt. iii. 8.

“ bring forth fruits meet for repentance.” When more particular directions were desired, he commanded all sorts of men to avoid more especially the sins, to which their condition most exposed them. Thus when the * people asked him (the common people of that hard-hearted nation,) What shall we do?— John answered, “ He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.” That is, let every one of you, according to his abilities, exercise those duties of charity and kindness to his neighbour, which you are all of you but too apt to neglect. The publicans or farmers of the revenue came to him, and said, “ † Master, what shall we do?” and he said, “ Exact no more than that which is appointed you.” Keep clear from that rapine and extortion of which you are so often guilty in the collection of the revenue. The ‡ soldiers too demanded of him, “ What shall we do?” his answer was, “ Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely, and be content with your wages.” That is, abstain from those acts of injustice, violence, and oppression, to which your profession too often leads you. Lewd and debauched people also applied to him, to whom, no doubt, he gave advice suited to their case. And therefore what he taught was, not ceremonial observances, but moral conduct on religious principle; and without this he pronounced (however disgusting the doctrine must be to a proud and superstitious people) the highest outward privileges to be of no value at all. “ § Think not,” said he to the Jews, “ to say within yourselves, ‘ We have Abraham to our father, and are therefore sure of God’s favour, be our

* Luke, iii. 10, 11.

† Luke, iii. 12, 13.

‡ Ibid, iii. 14.

§ Matt. iii. 9.

conduct what it may:’ for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham;” is able to make the most stupid and ignorant of these heathens, whom you so utterly despise, converts to true religion, and heirs of the promises.

Such were the doctrines which John preached to his disciples, and the success which attended him was equal to their magnitude and importance.

This was plainly foretold by the angel that announced his birth to his father Zacharias. “ * Many of the children of Israel (said he) shall he turn to the Lord their God.” Which in fact he did. For the evangelists tell us, that “ there went out unto him into the wilderness, Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him †.” The truth of this is amply confirmed by Josephus, who informs us, that multitudes flocked to him, for they were greatly delighted with his discourses ‡.”

It might naturally be expected that such extraordinary popularity and applause as this, would fill him with conceit and vanity, and inspire him with a most exalted opinion of his own abilities, and a sovereign contempt for any rival teacher of religion. But so far from this, the most prominent feature of his character was an unexampled modesty and humility. Though he had been styled by Malachi the messenger of the Lord, and even Elias (the chief prophet of the Jews next to Moses) he never assumed any higher title than that very humble one given him by Isaiah; *the voice of one crying in the wilderness*. Far from desiring or attempting to fix the admiration of the multitude on his own person, he gave notice, from his first

* Luke, i. 16.

† Matt. iii. 5, 6.

‡ Joseph. Antiq. Jud. xviii. 2. Edit. Huds.

appearance, of *another* immediately to follow him, for whom he was unworthy to perform the most servile offices. He made a scruple, till expressly commanded, of baptizing one so infinitely purer than himself, as he knew the holy Jesus to be. And when his disciples complained that all men deserted him to follow Christ (a most mortifying circumstance, had worldly applause, or interest, or power, been his point,) nothing could be more ingenuously self-denying than his answer; “Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am *not* the Christ, but am sent before him. He that hath the bride, is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly. This my joy, therefore, is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease. He that is of the earth, is earthly; he that cometh from heaven, is above all*.”

Of such unaffected and disinterested humility as this, where shall we find, except in Christ, another instance? Yet with this was by no means united what we are too apt to associate with our idea of humility, *meanness and timidity of spirit*; on the contrary, the whole conduct of the Baptist was marked throughout with the most intrepid courage and magnanimity in the discharge of his duty.

Instead of paying any court either to the great men of his nation on the one hand, or to the multitude on the other, he reprov'd the former for their hypocrisy in the strongest terms; “O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come †?” and he required the latter to renounce every one of those favourite sins which they had long indulged, and were most unwilling to part with. But what is

* John, iii. 28—31.

† Matt. iii. 7.

still more, he reprov'd, without fear and without reserve, the abandoned and ferocious Herod, for injuriously taking away Herodias, his brother's wife, and afterwards incestuously marrying her, and for all the other evil that he had done. He well knew the savage and unrelenting temper of that sanguinary tyrant; he knew that this boldness of expostulation would sooner or later bring down upon him the whole weight of his resentment. But knowing also, that he was sent into the world to preach repentance to all, and feeling it his duty to cry aloud and spare not, to spare not even the greatest and most exalted of sinners, he determin'd not to shrink from that duty, but to obey his conscience, and take the consequences.

Those consequences were exactly what he must have foreseen. He was first shut up in prison; and not long afterwards, as you all know, the life of this great and innocent man was wantonly sacrificed in the midst of conviviality and mirth, to the rash oath of a worthless and a merciless prince, to the licentious fascinations of a young woman, and the implacable vengeance of an old one.

After this short history of the doctrines, the life, and the death of this extraordinary man, I beg leave to offer, in conclusion, a few remarks upon it to your serious consideration.

And in the first place, in the testimony of John the Baptist, we have an additional and powerful evidence to the truth and the divine authority of Christ and his religion.

If the account given of John in the gospels be true, the history given there of Jesus must be equally so, for they are plainly parts of one and the same plan,

and are so connected and interwoven with each other, that they must either stand or fall together.

Now that in the first place there did really exist such a person as John the Baptist, at the time specified by the evangelists, there cannot be the smallest doubt; for he is mentioned by the Jewish historian Josephus, and all the circumstances he relates of him, as far as they go, perfectly correspond with the description given of him by the sacred historians. He represents him as using the ceremony of baptism. He says that multitudes flocked to him, for they were greatly delighted with his discourses, and ready to observe all his directions. He asserts that he was a good man; and that he exhorted the Jews not to come to his baptism without first preparing themselves for it by the practice of virtue; that is, in the language of the gospels, without repentance. He relates his being inhumanly murdered by Herod; and adds, that the Jews in general entertained so high an opinion of the innocence, virtue, and sanctity of John, as to be persuaded that the destruction of Herod's army, which happened not long after, was a divine judgement inflicted on him for his barbarity to so excellent a man*.

It appears then that St. John was a person, of whose virtue, integrity, and piety, we have the most ample testimony from an historian of unquestionable veracity, and we may therefore rely with perfect confidence on every thing he tells us. He was the very man foretold both by Isaiah and Malachi, as the forerunner of that divine personage, whom the Jews expected under the name of the Messiah. He declared that Jesus Christ was this divine person, and that he

* Joseph. Antiq. l. xviii. c. 6. s. 2. Ed. Huds.

himself was sent into the world on purpose to prepare the way before him, by exhorting men to repentance and reformation of life. If then this *record* of John (as the evangelists call it) be true, the divine mission of Christ is at once established, because the Baptist expressly asserts that he was the Son of God, and that whoever believed on him should have everlasting life.* Now that this record is true, we have every reason in the world to believe, not only because a man so eminently distinguished for every moral virtue as St. John confessedly was, cannot be thought capable of publicly proclaiming a deliberate falsehood; but because had his character been of a totally different complexion, had he for instance been influenced only by views of interest, ambition, vanity, popularity, this very falsehood must have completely counteracted and upset every project of this nature. For every thing he said of Jesus, instead of aggrandizing and exalting *himself*, tended to lower and to debase him in the eyes of all the world; he assured the multitude who followed him, that there was another person much more worthy to be followed; that there was one coming after him of far greater dignity and consequence than himself; one whose shoes latchet he was not worthy to unloose†; one so infinitely superior to him in rank, authority, and wisdom, that he was not fit to perform for him even the most servile offices. He himself was only come as a humble messenger to announce the arrival of his Lord, and smooth the way before him. But the great personage to whom they were to direct their eyes, and in whom they were to centre all their hopes, was JESUS CHRIST. Is this now the language of a man who sought only for

* John, iii. 6; i. 34.

† Mark, i. 7. Luke, iii. 16.

honour, emolument, or fame, or was actuated only by the fond ambition of being at the head of a sect? No one can think so. It is not very usual surely for men of *any* character, much less for men of the *best* character, to invent and to utter a string of falsehoods with the professed design of degrading themselves and exalting some other person. Yet this was the plain tendency and avowed object of John's declarations, and the effect was exactly what might be expected, and what he wished and intended, namely, that great numbers deserted him and followed Christ*.

But besides bearing this honest and disinterested testimony to Christ, the Baptist hazarded a measure which no impostor or enthusiast ever ventured upon, without being immediately detected and exposed. He ventured to deliver *two prophecies* concerning Christ; prophecies too which were to be completed, not at some distant period, when both he and his hearers might be in their graves, and the prophecy itself forgot, but within a very short space of time, when every one who heard the prediction might be a witness to its accomplishment or its failure. He foretold, that *Jesus should baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire*, and that *he should be offered up as a sacrifice for the sins of mankind*†. These were very singular things for a man to foretel at hazard and from conjecture, because nothing could be more remote from the ideas of a Jew, or more unlikely to happen in the common course of things. They were moreover of that peculiar nature, that it was utterly impossible for John and Jesus to concert the matter between themselves; for the completion of the prophecies did not depend solely on *them*, but required the concur-

* John, iii. 26. 30; iv. 1.

† Matt. iii. 11. John, i. 29.

rence of other agents, of the Holy Ghost in the first instance, and of the Jews and the Roman governor in the other; and unless these had entered into a confederacy with the Baptist and with Christ, to fulfil what John foretold, it was not in the power of either to secure the completion of it. Yet both these prophecies were, we know, actually accomplished within a very few years after they were delivered; for our Lord suffered death upon the cross for the redemption of the world; and the Holy Ghost descended visibly upon the apostles in the semblance of fire on the day of Pentecost*.

It is evident then that the Baptist was not only a good man, but a true prophet; and for both reasons, his testimony in favour of Christ, that he was the Son of God, affords an incontestable proof that both he and his religion came from heaven.

2. The history of the Baptist affords a proof also of another point of no small importance. It gives a strong confirmation to that great evangelical doctrine, the doctrine of atonement; the expiation of our sins by the sacrifice of Christ upon the cross.

We are often told, that there was no need for this expiation. That repentance and reformation are fully sufficient to restore the most abandoned sinners to the favour of a just and merciful God, and to avert the punishment due to their offences.

But what does the great herald and forerunner of Christ say to this? He came professedly as *a preacher of repentance*. This was his peculiar office, the great object of his mission, the constant topic of his exhortations. "Repent ye, and bring forth fruits meet for

* Acts, ii. 2.

repentance*.” This was the unceasing language of “the voice crying in the wilderness.”

If then repentance alone had sufficient efficacy for the expiation of sin, surely we should have heard of this from him who came on purpose to preach repentance. But what is the case? Does he tell us, that repentance *alone* will take away the guilt of our transgressions; and justify us in the eyes of our Maker? Quite the contrary. Notwithstanding the great stress he justly lays on the indispensable necessity of repentance, yet he tells his followers at the same time, that it was to *Christ only*, and to his death, that they were to look for the pardon of their sins. “Behold,” says he, “the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world †!” And again, “he that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son hath not life, but the wrath of God abideth on him ‡.” Since then the expiation of sin by the sacrifice of Christ is a doctrine not only taught in the gospel itself, but enforced also by him who came only to prepare the way for it; it is evident, from the care taken to apprise the world of it even *before* Christianity was promulgated, how important and essential a part this must be of that divine religion.

Lastly, it will be of use to observe, what the particular method was which John made use of to *prepare* men for the reception and the belief of the gospel; for whatever means he applied to the attainment of that end, the same probably we shall find the most efficacious for a similar purpose at this very day.

Now it is evident that the Baptist addressed himself, in the first instance, not to the *understanding*, but to

* Matt. iii. 2. 8.

† Luke, i. 29.

‡ John, iii. 36.

the *heart*. He did not attempt to convince his hearers, but to reform them; he did not say to them, go and study the prophets, examine with care the pretensions of him whom I announce, and weigh accurately all the evidences of his divine mission; he well knew how all this would end, in the then corrupt state of their minds. His exhortation was, therefore, “*Repent ye, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand.*” It was on this principle he reprov'd with so much severity the pharisees and sadducees who came to his baptism, whom one would think he should rather have encouraged and commended, and received with open arms. “O generation of vipers, who hath warn'd you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth, therefore, fruits meet for repentance*.” Till you have done this, till you have purified your hearts and abandoned your sins, my baptism will be of no use to you, and all the reasoning in the world will have no effect upon you. In perfect conformity to this, Josephus informs us, that John exhorted the Jews not to come to his baptism, without first preparing themselves for it *by the practice of virtue*, by a strict adherence to the rules of equity and justice in their dealings with one another, and by manifesting a sincere piety towards God.

This is the preparation he required; and thus it is that we also must prepare men for the reception of divine truth. We must first reform, and then convince them. It is not in general the want of evidence, but the want of virtue that makes men infidels; let them cease to be wicked, and they will soon cease to be unbelievers. “It is with the heart,” says St. Paul (not with the head) “that man believeth unto righte-

* Matt. iii. 7, 8.

ousness*.” Correct the heart, and all will go right. Unless the soil is good, all the seed you cast upon it will be wasted in vain. In the parable of the sower we find, that the only seed which came to perfection was that which fell on *good ground*, on an honest and a good heart. This is the first and most essential requisite to belief. Unbelievers complain of the mysteries of revelation; but we have the highest authority for saying, that *in general* the only mystery which prevents them from receiving it, is the mystery of iniquity.

We hear, indeed, a great deal of the good nature, the benevolence, the generosity, the humanity, the honour, and the other innumerable good qualities of those that reject the gospel; and they may possibly possess some ostentatious and popular virtues, and may keep clear from flagrant and disreputable vices. But whether some gross depravity, some inveterate prejudice, or some leaven of vanity and self-conceit, does not commonly lurk in their hearts, and influence both their opinions and their practices, they who have an extensive acquaintance with the writings and the conduct of that class of men will find no difficulty in deciding. If however this was the decision of man only, the justness of it might be controverted, and the competency of the judge denied. It might be said, that it is unbecoming and presumptuous in any human being to pass severe censures on large bodies of men; and that, without being able to look into the heart of man, it is impossible to form a right judgement of his moral character. This we do not deny. But if he who actually *has* that power of looking into the heart of man, if he who is perfectly well acquaint-

* Rom. x. 10.

ed with human nature, and all the various characters of men; if *he* has declared that *men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil**, who will controvert the truth of that decision? On this authority then we may securely rely, and may rest assured, that whatever pretences may be set up for rejecting revelation, the grand obstacles to it are, indolence, indifference, vice, passion, prejudice, self-conceit, pride, vanity, love of singularity, a disdain to think with the vulgar, and an ambition to be considered as superior to the rest of mankind, in genius, penetration, and discernment. It is by removing these impediments in the first place, that we must prepare men, as St. John did, for embracing the religion of Christ. These (to make use of prophetic language) are the *mountains* that must be made low; these the *crooked paths* that must be made straight; these the *rough places* that must be made plain. Then all difficulties will be removed, and there will be A HIGH WAY FOR OUR GOD. Then there will be a smooth and easy approach for the gospel to the understanding, as well as to the heart; there will be nothing to oppose its conquest over the soul. THE GLORY OF THE LORD SHALL FULLY BE REVEALED, AND ALL FLESH SHALL SEE IT †.

* John, iii. 19.

† Isaiah, xl. 5.

LECTURE IV.

MATTHEW IV.—FORMER PART.

THE fourth chapter of St. Matthew, at which we are now arrived, opens with an account of that most singular and extraordinary transaction, THE TEMPTATION OF CHRIST IN THE WILDERNESS. The detail of it is as follows :

“ Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil ; and when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterwards an hungred. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, it is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto him, if thou be the son of God, cast thyself down : for it is written, he shall give his angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Again the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them ; and saith unto him, all these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down

and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.*”

Such is the history given by the evangelists of our Lord's temptation, which has been a subject of much discussion among learned men. It is well known in particular that several ancient commentators, as well as many able and pious men of our own times, have thought that this temptation was not a real transaction, but only a vision or prophetic trance, similar to that which Ezekiel describes in the eighth chapter of his prophecy, and to that which befel St. Peter when he saw a vessel descending unto him from heaven, and let down to the earth†. And it must be acknowledged that this opinion is supported by many specious arguments, and seems to remove some considerable difficulties. But upon the whole there are, I think, stronger reasons for adhering to the literal interpretation, than for recurring to a visionary representation.

For, in the first place, it is a rule admitted and established by the best and most judicious interpreters, that in explaining the sacred writings we ought never, without the most apparent and most indispensable necessity, allow ourselves the liberty of departing from the plain, obvious, and literal meaning of the words. Now I conceive that no such necessity can be alleged in the present instance. It is true, that there are in this narrative many difficulties, and many extraordinary, surprising, and miraculous incidents. But the whole history of our Saviour is wonderful and miraculous from beginning to end; and if, whenever we meet

* Matt. iv. 1—11.

† Acts, x. 10—16.

with a difficulty or a miracle, we may have recourse to figure, metaphor, or vision, we shall soon reduce a great part of the sacred writings to nothing else. Besides, these difficulties will several of them admit of a fair solution; and where they do not, as they affect no article of faith or practice, they must be left among those inscrutable mysteries which it is natural to expect in a revelation from heaven. This we must after all be content to do, even if we adopt the idea of vision; for even *that* does not remove *every* difficulty, and it creates some that do not attach to the literal interpretation.

2. In the next place, I cannot find in any part of this narrative of the temptation, the slightest or most distant intimation that it is nothing more than a vision. The very first words with which it commences seem to imply the direct contrary. “Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil.” Does not this say, in the most express terms, that our Lord was led, not in a dream, or trance, or vision, but was actually and literally led by the spirit into the wilderness of Judea? There is, I know, an interpretation which explains away this obvious meaning. But that interpretation rests solely on the doubtful signification of a single Greek particle, which is surely much too slender a ground to justify a departure from the plain and literal sense of the passage. Certain it is, that if any one had meant to describe a real transaction, he could not have selected any expressions better adapted to that purpose than those actually made use of by the evangelist; and I believe no one, at his first reading of our Lord’s temptation, ever entertained the slightest idea of its being a visionary representation.

3. There is an observation which has been made, and which has great weight in this question. It is this: all the prophets of the Old Testament, except Moses, saw visions, and dreamed dreams; and the prophets of the New did the same. St. Peter had a vision, St. John saw visions, St. Paul had visions and dreams: but Christ himself neither saw visions nor dreamed dreams. He had an intimate and immediate communication with the Father; and he, and no one else in his days, had *seen* the Father. The case was the same with Moses; he saw God face to face. "If there be a prophet among you," says God to Aaron and Miriam, "I the Lord will make myself known to him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is *not* so, who is faithful in all my house: with him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold*." Now Moses, we all know, was a type of Christ; and the resemblance holds between them in this instance, as well as in many others. They neither of them had visions or dreams, but had both an immediate communication with God. They both "saw God face to face †." This was a distinction and a mark of dignity peculiar to those two only, to the great legislator of the Jews, and the great legislator of the Christians. It is therefore inconsistent with this high privilege, this mark of superior eminence, to suppose that our Lord was tempted in a vision, when we see no other instance of a vision in the whole course of his ministry.

4. There is still another consideration which militates strongly against the supposition of a visionary temptation. It was in itself extremely probable, that

* Num. xii. 6—8.

† Exod. xxxiii. 11.

there should be a real and personal conflict between Christ and Satan, when the former was entering on his public ministry.

It is well known that the great chief of the fallen angels, who is described in scripture under the various names of Satan, Beelzebub, the Devil, and the Prince of the devils, has ever been an irreconcilable enemy to the human race, and has been constantly giving the most decided and most fatal proofs of this enmity from the beginning of the world to this hour. His hostility began with the very first creation of man upon earth, when he no sooner discovered our first parents in that state of innocence and happiness in which the gracious hand of the Almighty had just placed them, than, with a malignity truly diabolical, he resolved, if possible, to destroy all this fair scene of virtuous bliss, and to plunge them into the gulf of sin and misery. For this purpose, he exerted all his art and subtilty and powers of persuasion; and how well he succeeded, we all know and feel. From that hour he established and exercised an astonishing dominion over the minds of men, leading them into such acts of folly, stupidity, and wickedness, as can on no other principle be accounted for. At the time of our Saviour's appearance, his tyranny seems to have arrived at its utmost height, and to have extended to the bodies as well as to the souls of men, of both which he sometimes took absolute *possession*: as we see in the history of those unhappy persons mentioned in scripture, whom we call demoniacs, and who were truly said to be *possessed* by the devil. It was therefore extremely natural to suppose, that when he found there was a great and extraordinary personage who had just made his appearance in the world, who

was said to be the Son of God, the promised Saviour of mankind, that seed of the woman who was to bruise the serpent's head ; it was natural that he should be exceedingly alarmed at these tidings, that he should tremble for his dominion ; that he should first endeavour to ascertain the fact, whether this was really the Christ or not ; and if it turned out to be so, that he should exert his utmost efforts to subdue this formidable enemy, or at least to seduce him from his allegiance to God, and divert him from his benevolent purpose towards man. He had ruined the first Adam, and he might therefore flatter himself with the hope of being equally successful with the second Adam. He had entailed a mortal disease on the human race ; and to prevent their recovery from that disease, and their restoration to virtue and to happiness, would be a triumph indeed, a conquest worthy of the Prince of the devils.

On the other hand, it was equally probable, that our blessed Lord would think it a measure highly proper, to begin his ministry with showing a decided superiority over the great adversary of man, whose empire he was going to abolish ; with manifesting to mankind that the great Captain of their salvation was able to accomplish the important work he had undertaken, and with setting an example of virtuous firmness to his followers, which might encourage them to resist the most powerful temptations that the Prince of darkness could throw in their way.

These considerations, in addition to many others, afford a strong ground for believing that the temptation of Christ in the wilderness was, as the history itself plainly intimates, a real transaction, a personal contest between the great enemy and the great Re-

deemer of the human race; and in this point of view, therefore, I shall proceed to consider some of the most remarkable circumstances attending it, and the practical uses resulting from it*.

We are told, in the first place, that “Jesus was led up of the Spirit into the wilderness,” that is, not by the evil spirit, but by the Spirit of God, by the suggestions and by the impulse of the Holy Ghost, of whose divine influences he was then full. For the time when this happened was immediately after his baptism, which is related in the conclusion of the preceding chapter. We are there informed, that “Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water, and, lo! the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him, and, lo! a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased†. *Then* (it immediately follows) was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil. In that moment of exaltation, when he was acknowledged by a voice from heaven to be the Son of God, and when the Spirit of God had taken full possession

* It is an ingenious observation of a learned friend of mine, that the temptation of Christ in the wilderness bears an evident analogy to the trial of Adam in Paradise, and elucidates the nature of that trial in which the tempter prevailed and man fell. The *second* Adam, who undertook the cause of fallen men, was subjected to temptation by the same apostate spirit. Herein the tempter failed, and the second Adam, in consequence, became the restorer of the fallen race of the first. St. Paul, in more places than one, points out the resemblance between the first Adam and the second; and the temptation in the wilderness exhibits a most interesting transaction, where the second Adam was actually placed in a situation very similar to that of the first. The secrets of the Most High are unfathomable to short-sighted mortals; but it would appear, from what may be humbly learnt and inferred from this transaction, that our blessed Lord’s temptation by Satan was a necessary part in the divine economy towards accomplishing the redemption of mankind.

† Matt. iii. 16—17.

of his soul, then it was that Jesus went forth under the guidance of that Spirit, in full confidence of his divine power, into the wilderness, to encounter the Prince of this world. A plain proof that this contest was a preconcerted design, a measure approved by Heaven, and subservient to the grand design, in which our Saviour was engaged, of rescuing mankind from the dominion of Satan.

The place into which our blessed Lord was thus led was *the wilderness*, probably the *great wilderness* near the river Jordan, in which Jesus was baptized, and soon afterwards tempted. This wilderness is thus described by a traveller of great credit and veracity, who had himself seen it. “ In a few hours (says this writer) we arrived at that mountainous desert, in which our Saviour was led by the Spirit to be tempted by the devil. It is a most miserable dry barren place, consisting of high rocky mountains, so torn and disordered as if the earth had suffered some great convulsion, in which its very bowels had been turned outward. On the left hand, looking down into a deep valley, as we passed along we saw some ruins of small cells and cottages, which we were told were formerly the habitations of hermits retiring hither for penance and mortification; and certainly there could not be found in the whole earth, a more comfortless and abandoned place for that purpose. On descending from these hills of desolation into the plain, we soon came to the foot of Mount Quarantania, which they say is the mountain from whence the devil tempted our Saviour with that visionary scene of all the kingdoms and glories of this world. It is, as St. Matthew calls it, *an exceeding high mountain*, and in its ascent difficult and dangerous. It has a small chapel at the

top, and another about half way up, on a prominent part of a rock. Near this latter are several caves and holes in the sides of the mountain, made use of anciently by hermits, and by some at this day for places to keep their Lent in, in imitation of that of our blessed Saviour*.”

This was a theatre perfectly proper for the prince of the fallen angels to act his part upon, and perfectly well suited to his dark malignant purposes.

Here, then, after our Saviour (as Moses and Elijah had done before him) had endured a long abstinence from food, the devil abruptly and artfully assailed him with a temptation well calculated to produce a powerful effect on a person faint and worn out with fasting. “If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.” But our Saviour repelled this insidious advice by quoting the words of Moses to the Israelites in the wilderness: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God†.” That is, he that brought me into this wilderness, and subjected me to these trials, can support me under the pressure of hunger, by a variety of means, besides the common one of bread, just as he fed the Israelites in the wilderness with manna, with food from heaven. I will, therefore, rather choose to rely on his gracious providence for my support in this exigency, than work a miracle myself for the supply of my wants.

This answer was perfectly conformable to the principle on which our Lord acted throughout the whole of his ministry. All his miracles were wrought for the benefit of others, not one for his own gratification. Though he endured hunger and thirst, and indigence

* Maundrell.

† Deut. viii. 3.

Matt. iv. 4.

and fatigue, and all the other evils of a laborious and an itinerant life, yet he never once relieved himself from any of these inconveniencies, or procured a single comfort to himself by the working of miracles. These were all appropriated to the grand object of proving the truth of his religion and the reality of his divine mission, and he never applied them to any other purpose. And in this, as in all other cases, he acted with the most perfect wisdom; for had he always or often delivered himself from the sufferings and the distresses incident to human nature by the exertions of his miraculous powers, the benefit of his example would have been in a great measure lost to mankind, and it would have been of little use to us, *that he was in all things tempted like as we are**, because he would have been supported and succoured, as we cannot expect to be.

Having thus failed in attempting to work upon one of the strongest of the sensual appetites, *hunger*, the tempter's next application was to a different passion, but one which, in some minds, is extremely powerful, and often leads to great folly and guilt, I mean vanity and self-importance. "He taketh our Lord into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down; for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone†."

The place where our Saviour now stood was on a pinnacle, or rather on a wing of the magnificent temple of Jerusalem, from whence there was a view of the vast concourse of people who were worshipping

* Heb. iv. 15.

† Matt. iv. 5, 6.

in the area below. In this situation the seducer flattered himself that our Saviour, indignant at the doubts which he artfully expressed of his being the Son of God, would be eager to give him, and all the multitude that beheld them, a most convincing proof that he was so, by casting himself from the height on which he stood into the court below, accompanied all the way as he descended by an illustrious host of angels, anxiously guarding his person from all danger, and plainly manifesting, by their solicitude to protect and to preserve him, that they had a most invaluable treasure committed to their care, and that he was in truth the beloved Son of God, the peculiar favourite of Heaven.

To a vain-glorious mind nothing could have been more gratifying, more flattering, than such a proposal as this : more especially as so magnificent a spectacle in the sight of all the Jews would probably have induced them to receive him as their Messiah, whom it is well known they expected to descend visibly from heaven in some such triumphant manner as this.

But on the humble mind of Jesus all this had no effect. To him who never affected parade or show, who never courted admiration or applause, who kept himself as quiet and as retired as the nature of his mission would allow, and frequently withdrew, from the multitudes that flocked around him, to deserts and to mountains; to him this temptation carried no force; his answer was, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God;" thou shalt not rush into unnecessary danger in order to *tempt* God, in order to *try* whether he will interpose to save thee in a miraculous manner; much less ought this to be done, as now proposed, for the purposes of vanity and ostentation.

The next temptation is thus described by St. Matthew :

“ Again the Devil taketh him up into an *exceeding high mountain*, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them ; and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me*.”

It has been thought an insuperable difficulty to conceive how Satan could, from any mountain, however elevated, show to our Saviour all the kingdoms of the earth and the glory of them. And even they who defend the literal sense of the transaction in general, yet have recourse to a visionary representation in this particular instance. But there seems to me no necessity for calling in the help of a vision even here. The evangelist describes the mountain on which Christ was placed as an *exceeding high one* ; and the traveller † to whom I before referred, describes it in the same terms. From thence of course there must have been a very extensive view ; and accordingly another writer, the Abbé Mariti, in his travels through Cyprus, &c. speaking of this mountain, says, “ Here we enjoyed the most beautiful prospect imaginable. This part of the mountain overlooks the mountains of Arabia, the country of Gilead, the country of the Ammonites, the plains of Moab, the plain of Jericho, the river Jordan, and the whole extent of the Dead Sea.” These various domains the tempter might show to our Lord distinctly, and might also at the same time *point out* (for so the original word *δεικνυμι* sometimes signifies) and direct our Lord’s eye towards several other regions that lay beyond them, which might comprehend all the principal kingdoms of the eastern world. And he might then properly enough say, “ All these

* Matt. iv. 8, 9.

† Maundrell.

kingdoms which you now see, or towards which I now point, will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." This explanation appears to me an easy and a natural one. But if others think differently, it is sufficient to say, that this particular incident is not more extraordinary than almost every other part of this very singular transaction; throughout the whole of which, the devil appears to have been permitted to exercise a power far beyond what naturally belonged to him.

But whatever we may decide on this point, the nature and magnitude of the temptation are evident. It is no less than an offer of kingdoms, with all their glory; all the honours, power, rank, wealth, grandeur, and magnificence, that this world has to give. But all these put together could not for one moment shake the firm mind of our divine master, or seduce him from the duty he owed to God. He rejected with abhorrence the impious proposition made to him, and answered with a proper indignation, in the words of scripture, "Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve*." Upon this we are told that the devil left him, and that angels came and ministered unto him.

Thus ended this memorable scene of Christ's temptation in the wilderness. The reasons of it respecting our Lord have been already explained; the instructions it furnishes to ourselves are principally these:

1. It teaches us, that even the best of men may sometimes be permitted to fall into great temptations, for we see that our blessed Lord himself was exposed to the severest. They are not therefore to be consi-

* Matt. iv. 10, 11.

dered as marks of God's displeasure or desertion of us, but only as trials of our virtue; as means of proving (as Moses tells the Israelites) what is in our hearts, whether we will keep God's commandments or no*; as opportunities graciously afforded us to demonstrate our sincerity, our fortitude, our integrity, our unshaken allegiance and fidelity to the great ruler of the world.

2. Whenever we are thus brought into temptation, we have every reason to hope for the divine assistance to extricate us from danger. We have the example of our blessed Lord to encourage us. We see the great captain of our salvation assaulted by all the art and all the power of Satan, and yet rising superior to all his efforts. We see him going before us in the paths of virtue and of glory, and calling upon us to follow him. Though he was led by the spirit of God himself into the wilderness in order to be tempted, yet the same divine spirit accompanied and supported him throughout the whole of his bitter conflict, and enabled him to triumph over his infernal adversary. To the same heavenly spirit *we* also may look for deliverance. If we implore God in fervent prayer to send him to us, he will assuredly grant our petition. He will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able, but will with the temptation also *make* a way to escape (when we ourselves cannot *find* one) that we may be able to bear it †.

3. We may learn from the conduct of our Lord under this great trial, that when temptations assail us, we are not to parley or to reason with them, to hesitate and deliberate whether we shall give way to them or not, but must at once repel them with firmness and with vigour, and oppose to the dictates of our passions

* Deut. viii. 2.

† 1 Cor. x. 13.

the plain and positive commands of God in his holy word. We must say resolutely to the tempter, as our Lord did, "Get thee hence, Satan*;" and he will instantly flee from *us* as he did from *him*.

4. It is a most solid consolation to us under such contests as these, that if we honestly exert our utmost efforts to vanquish the enemies of our salvation, most humbly and devoutly soliciting at the same time the influences of divine grace to aid our weak endeavours, the unavoidable errors and imperfections of our nature will not be ascribed to us, nor will God be extreme to mark every thing that is done amiss; for we shall not be judged by one who has no *feeling* of our infirmities, but by one who knows and who pities them, who was himself in all things tempted like as we are, yet without sin †, and who will make therefore all due allowances for our involuntary failings, though none for our wilful transgressions.

5. And lastly, in the various allurements presented to our Lord, we see but too faithful a picture of those we are to expect ourselves in our progress through life. Our Lord's temptations were, as we have seen, sensual gratifications, incitements to vanity and ostentation, and the charms of wealth, power, rank, and splendour. All these will in the different stages of our existence successively rise up to seduce us, to oppose our progress to heaven, and bring us into captivity to sin and misery. Pleasure, interest, business, honour, glory, fame, all the follies and all the corruptions of the world, will each in their turn assault our feeble nature; and through these we must manfully fight our way to the great end we have in view. But the difficulty and the pain of this contest will be considerably lessened

* Matt. iv. 10.

† Heb. iv. 15.

by a resolute and vigorous exertion of our powers and our resources at our first setting out in life. It was immediately after his baptism, and at the beginning of his ministry, that our Lord was exposed to all the power and all the artifices of the devil, and completely triumphing over both, effectually secured himself from all future attempts of that implacable enemy. In the same manner it is on our first setting out in life, that we are to look for the most violent assaults from our passions within, and from the world and the prince of it without. And if we strenuously resist those enemies of our salvation that present themselves to us at that most critical and dangerous period, all the rest that follow in our maturer age will be an easy conquest. On him, who in the beginning of life has preserved himself unspotted from the world, all its consequent attractions and allurements, and its magnificence, wealth, and splendour, will make little or no impression. A mind that has been long habituated to discipline and self-government amidst far more powerful temptations, will have nothing to apprehend from such assailants as these. But after all, our great security is assistance from above, which will never be denied to those who fervently apply for it. And with the power of divine grace to support us, with the example of our Lord in the wilderness to animate us, and an eternity of happiness to reward us, what is there that can shake our constancy or corrupt our fidelity?

Set yourselves then without delay to acquire an early habit of strict self-government, and an early intercourse with your heavenly protector and comforter. Let it be your first care to establish the sovereignty of reason and the empire of grace over your soul, and you will soon find it no difficulty to repel the most

powerful temptations. “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith; quit yourselves like men; be strong*,” be resolute, be patient; look frequently up to the prize that is set before you, lest you be weary and faint in your minds. Consider that every pleasure you sacrifice to your duty here, will be placed to your credit and increase your happiness hereafter. The conflict with your passions will grow less irksome every day. A few years (with some of you perhaps a *very* few) will put an entire end to it; and you will then, to your unspeakable comfort, be enabled to cry out with St. Paul, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day†.”

* 1 Cor. xvi. 13.

† 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

LECTURE V.

MATTHEW IV.—LATTER PART.

THE former part of the fourth chapter of St. Matthew, which contains the history of our Saviour's temptation, having been explained to you in the preceding Lecture, I shall now proceed to the latter part of the chapter, in which an account is given of the first opening of our blessed Lord's ministry, by his preaching, by his chusing a few companions to attend him, and by his beginning to work miracles; all which things are stated very briefly, without any attempt to expatiate on the importance and magnitude of the subject, which was nevertheless the noblest and most interesting that is to be found in history; an enterprize the most stupendous and astonishing that ever before entered into the mind of man, nothing less than the conversion of a whole world from wickedness and idolatry to virtue and true religion.

On this vast undertaking our Lord now entered; and we are informed by St. Matthew, in the 17th verse of this chapter, in what *manner* he first announced himself and his religion to the world. His first address to the people was similar to that of the Baptist, *Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.* The very first qualification he required of

those who aspired to be his disciples was *repentance*, a sincere contrition for all past offences, and a resolution to renounce in future every species of sin; for sin, he well knew, would be the grand obstacle to the reception of his gospel.

What a noble idea does this present to us of the dignity and sanctity of our divine religion! It cannot even be *approached* by the unhallowed and the profane. Before they can be admitted even into the outward courts of its sanctuary, they must leave their corrupt appetite and their sinful practices behind them. "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet," said God to Moses from the burning bush, "for the place whereon thou standest is *holy ground**." Put off all thy vicious habits, says Christ to every one that aspires to be his disciple, for the religion thou art to embrace is a holy religion, and the God thou art to serve is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot even *look* upon iniquity. In some of the ancient sects of philosophy, before any one could be admitted into their schools, or initiated in their mysteries, he was obliged to undergo a certain course of preparation, a certain term of trial and probation, which however consisted of little more than a few superstitious ceremonies, or some acts of external discipline and purification. But the preparation for receiving the Christian religion is *the preparation of the heart*. The discipline required for a participation of its privileges, is the mortification of sin, the sacrifice of every guilty propensity and desire.

This sacrifice however the great Founder of our religion did not require for nothing. He promised his followers a recompence infinitely beyond the indul-

* Exod. iii. 5.

gences they were to renounce; he promised them a place in his KINGDOM, a kingdom of which he was the sovereign; a kingdom of righteousness here, and of glory hereafter. *Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand**.

He then proceeds to select and associate to himself a certain number of persons, who were to be his assistants and coadjutors in the establishment and the administration of his heavenly kingdom.

And here it was natural to expect, that in making his choice he should look to men of influence, authority, and weight; that, being himself destitute of all the advantages of rank, power, wealth, and learning, he should endeavour to compensate for those defects in his own person by the contrary qualities of his associates, by connecting himself with some of the most powerful, most opulent, most learned, and most eloquent men of his time.

And this most undoubtedly would have been his mode of proceeding, had his object been to establish his religion by mere *human* means, by influence or by force, by the charms of eloquence, by the powers of reason, by the example, by the authority, by the fashion of the great. But these were not the instruments which Christ meant to make use of. He meant to show that he was *above* them all; that he had far other resources, far different auxiliaries, to call in to his support, in comparison of which all the wealth and magnificence, and power and wisdom of the world, were trivial and contemptible things. We find therefore that not the wise, not the mighty, not the noble, were called † to co-operate with him; but men of the meanest birth, of the lowest occupations, of the hum-

* Matt. iv. 17.

† 1 Cor. i. 26.

blest talents, and most uncultivated minds. “As he was walking by the sea of Galilee,” St. Matthew tells us, “he saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of *men*; and they straightway left their nets (that is, in fact, all their subsistence, all the little property they had in the world) and followed him. And going from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship, with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them, and they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him*.” These were the men whom he selected for his companions and assistants. These fishermen of Galilee were to be, under him, the instruments of overthrowing the stupendous and magnificent system of paganism and idolatry throughout the world, and producing the greatest change, the most general and most important revolution, in principles, in morals, and in religion, that ever took place on this globe. For this astonishing work, these simple, illiterate, humble men, were singled out by our Lord. He chose, as the apostle expresses it, “the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty†; that his religion might not be established by the enticing words of man’s wisdom, but by demonstration of the spirit and of power; that our faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God‡.”

Such were the associates chosen by him who was the delegate of heaven, and whose help was from above. We may expect therefore that an impostor,

* Matt. iv. 18—22.

† 1 Cor. i. 27.

‡ 1 Cor. ii. 4, 5.

who meant to rely on *human* means for success, would take a directly *contrary* course. And this we find in fact to be the case. Who were the companions and assistants selected by the grand impostor Mahomet? They were men of the most weight and authority, and rank and influence, among his countrymen. The reason is obvious; *he* wanted such supports; *Christ* did not; and hence the marked difference of their conduct in this instance. It is the natural difference between truth and imposture. That the power of God and not of man was the foundation on which our Lord meant to erect his new system, very soon appeared; for the next thing we hear of him is, that he “went about all Galilee teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease among the people*.”

Here then began that DEMONSTRATION OF THE SPIRIT AND OF POWER, which was to be the grand basis of his new kingdom, the great evidence of his heavenly mission. It is indeed probable, that the wisdom and the authority with which he spake, and the weight and importance of the doctrines he taught, would of themselves make a deep impression on the minds of his hearers, and produce him some followers. But had he stopt here, had he given his new disciples nothing but words, their zeal and attachment to him would soon have abated. For it was natural for these converts to say to him, “You have called upon us to repent and to reform; you have commanded us to renounce our vices, to relinquish our favourite pleasures and pursuits, to give up the world and its enjoyments, and to take up our cross and follow you; and in re-

* Matt. iv. 23.

turn for this you promise us distinguished happiness and honour in your spiritual kingdom. You speak, it is true, most forcibly to our consciences and to our hearts, and we feel strongly disposed to obey your injunctions, and to credit your promises; but still the sacrifice we are required to make is a great one, and the conflict we have to go through is a bitter one. We find it a most painful struggle to subdue confirmed habits, and to part at once with all our accustomed pleasures and indulgences. Before then we can entirely relinquish these, and make a complete change in the temper of our souls, and the conduct of our lives, we must have some convincing proof that you have a right to require this compliance at our hands; that what you enjoin us is in reality the command of God himself; that you are actually sent from heaven, and commissioned by him to teach us his will, and to instruct us in our duty; that the kingdom you hold out to us in another world is something more than mere imagination: that you are in short what you pretend to be, the SON OF GOD: and that you are able to make good the punishment you denounce against sin, and the rewards you promise to virtue.”

Our Lord well knew that this sort of reasoning must occur to every man's mind. He knew that it was highly proper and indispensably necessary to give some evidence of his divine commission, to do SOMETHING which should satisfy the world that he was the Son of God, and the delegate of heaven. And how could he do this so effectually as by performing works which it utterly exceeded all the strength and ability of man to accomplish, and which nothing less than the hand of God himself could possibly bring to pass? In other words, the proofs he gave of his mission were

those astonishing miracles which are recorded in the gospel, and which are here for the first time mentioned by St. Matthew, in the 23d verse of this chapter: "And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease among the people."

This then is the primary, the fundamental evidence of his divine authority, which our Lord was pleased to give to his followers. His first application, as we have seen, was (like that of his precursor John the Baptist) to their *hearts*, "REPENT YE," lay aside your vices and your prejudices. Till this was done, till these grand obstacles to the admission of truth were removed, he well knew that all he could say and all he could do would have no effect; they would not be moved either by his exhortations or his miracles; "they would not be persuaded though one rose from the dead*." And in fact we find that several of the Pharisees, men abandoned to vice and wickedness, did actually resist the miracles of Christ, and the resurrection of a man from the grave; they ascribed his casting out devils to Beelzebub; they were not convinced by the cure of the blind man, and the raising of Lazarus from the dead, though they saw them both before their eyes, one restored to sight, the other to life. This plainly proves how far the power of sin and of prejudice will go in closing up all the avenues of the mind against conviction; and how wisely our Saviour acted in calling upon his hearers to repent, before he offered any evidence to their understandings. But the way being thus cleared, the evidence was then produced, and the effect it had was such as might be

* Luke, xvi. 31.

expected; for St. Matthew tells us, that his fame went throughout all Syria; and that there followed him *great multitudes* of people from Galilee and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judea, and from beyond Jordan*; that is, from every quarter of his own country and the adjoining nations.

And indeed it can be no wonder that such multitudes were convinced and converted by what they saw. The wonder would have been if they had not. To those who were themselves eye-witnesses of his miracles, they must have been (except in a few instances of inveterate depravity of heart,) irresistible proofs of his divine mission. When they saw him give eyes to the blind, feet to the lame, health to the sick, and even life to the dead, by speaking only a few words; what other conclusion could they possibly draw than that which the centurion did, *truly this was the Son of God* †? To us indeed who have not seen these mighty works, and who live at the distance of eighteen hundred years from the time when they were wrought, the force of this evidence is undoubtedly less than it was to an eye-witness. But if the reality of these miracles is proved to us by sufficient testimony, by testimony such as no ingenuous and unprejudiced mind can withstand, they ought still to produce in us the firmest belief of the divine power of him who wrought them ‡.

It must be admitted at the same time, that these miracles, being facts of a very uncommon and very extraordinary nature, such as have never happened in our own times, and but very seldom even in former

* Matt. iv. 24, 25.

† Matt. xxvii. 54.

‡ Mr. Hume's abstruse and sophistical argument against miracles, has been completely refuted by Drs. Adams, Campbell, and Paley.

times, they require a much stronger degree of testimony to support them than common historical facts. And this degree of testimony they actually have. They are supported by a body of evidence fully adequate to the case; fully competent to outweigh all the disadvantages arising from the great distance and the astonishing nature of the events in question.

1. In the first place, these miracles are recorded in four different histories, written very near the time of their being performed, by four different men, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; two of whom saw these miracles with their own eyes; the other two had their account from them who did the same; and affirm, that "they had a perfect knowledge of every thing they relate*."

They were plain artless men, without the least appearance of enthusiasm or credulity about them, and rather slow than forward to believe any thing extraordinary and out of the common course of nature. They were perfectly competent to judge of plain matters of fact, of things which passed before their eyes, and could certainly tell, without the least possibility of being mistaken, whether a person whom they knew to be blind was actually restored to sight, and a person whom they knew to be dead was raised to life again, by a few words spoken by their master. They were men, who, from the simplicity of their manners, were not at all likely to invent and publish falsehoods of so extraordinary a nature; much less falsehoods by which they could gain nothing, and did in fact lose every thing. There is not therefore, from the peculiar character of these persons, the least ground for disbelieving the reality of any thing they relate.

* Luke, i. 3.

Nor is there any reason to doubt whether the writings we now have under their names are those which they actually wrote. They have been received as such ever since they were published; nor has any one argument been yet produced against their authenticity, which has not been repeatedly and effectually confuted.

2. It is a very strong circumstance in favour of our Saviour's miracles, that they were related by contemporary historians, by those who were eye-witnesses of them, and were afterwards acknowledged to be true by those who lived nearest to the times in which they were wrought; and what is still more to the point, by many who were hostile to the Christian religion. Even the emperor Julian himself, that most bitter adversary of Christianity, who had openly apostatized from it, who professed the most implacable hatred to it, who employed all his ingenuity, all his acuteness and learning, which were considerable, in combating the truth of it, in displaying in the strongest colours every objection he could raise up against it; even *he* did not deny the *reality* of our Lord's miracles*. He admitted that Jesus wrought them, but contended that he wrought them by the power of magic.

3. Unless we admit that the Founder of our religion did actually work the miracles ascribed to him by his historians, it is utterly impossible to account for the success and establishment of his religion. It could not, in short, to all appearance, have been established by any other means.

* Julian apud Cyrillum, L. vi. viii. x. Celsus also acknowledged the truth of the gospel-miracles in general, but ascribed them to the assistance of demons. "The Christians," says he, "seem to *prevail*, δαίμωνων τινων ὀνομασι και κατακλιησει, by virtue of the names and the invocations of certain demons." Orig. contra Celsum, ed. Cantab. l. i. p. 7.

Consider only for a moment what the apparent condition of our Lord was, when he first announced his mission among the Jews, what his pretensions and what his doctrines were, and then judge what kind of a reception he must have met with among the Jews, had his preaching been accompanied by no miracles. A young man of no education, born in an obscure village, of obscure parents, without any of those very brilliant talents or exterior accomplishments which usually captivate the hearts of men: without having previously written or done any thing that should excite the expectation, or attract the attention and admiration of the world, offers himself at once to the Jewish nation, not merely as a preacher of morality, but as a teacher sent from heaven; nay, what is more, as the Son of God, himself, and as that great deliverer, the Messiah, who had been so long predicted by the prophets, and was then so anxiously expected and so eagerly looked for by the whole Jewish people. He called upon this people to renounce at once a great part of the religion of their forefathers, and to adopt that which he proposed to them; to relinquish all their fond ideas of a splendid, a victorious, a triumphant Messiah, and to accept in his room a despised, a persecuted, and a crucified master: he required them to give up all their former prejudices, superstitions, and traditions, all their favourite rites and ceremonies, and, what was perhaps still dearer to them, their favourite vices and propensities, their hypocrisy, their rapaciousness, their voluptuousness. Instead of exterior forms, he prescribed sanctity of manners; instead of washing their hands, and making clean their platters, he commanded them to purify their hearts, and reform their lives. Instead of indulging in ease

and luxury, he called upon them to take up their cross and follow him through sorrows and sufferings; to pluck out a right eye, and to cut off a right arm; to leave father, mother, brethren, and sisters, for his name's sake and the gospel.

What now shall we say to doctrines such as these, delivered by such a person as our Lord appeared to be? Is it probable, is it possible, that the reputed son of a poor mechanic could, by the mere force of argument or persuasion, induce vast numbers of his countrymen to embrace opinions and practices so directly opposite to every propensity of their hearts, to every sentiment they had imbibed, every principle they had acted upon, from their earliest years? Yet the fact is, that he *did* prevail on multitudes to do so; and therefore he *must* have had means of conviction superior to all human eloquence or reasoning; that is, he must have convinced his hearers, by the miracles he wrought, that all power in heaven and on earth was given to him, and that every precept he delivered, and every doctrine he taught, was the voice of God himself. Without this, it is utterly impossible to give any rational account of his success.

In order to set this argument in a still stronger point of view, let us consider what the effect actually was in a case where a new religion was proposed without any support from miracles. That same impostor Mahomet, to whom I before alluded, began his mission with every advantage that could arise from personal figure, from insinuating manners, from a commanding eloquence, from an ardent enterprising spirit, from considerable wealth, and from powerful connexions. Yet with all these advantages, and with every artifice and every dexterous contrivance to

recommend his new religion to his countrymen, in a space of three years he made only about six converts, and those principally of his own family, relations, and most intimate friends. And his progress was but very slow for nine years after this, till he began to make use of force; and then his victorious arms, not his arguments, carried his religion triumphantly over almost all the eastern world.

It appears, therefore, that without the assistance either of miracles or of the sword, no religion can be propagated with such rapidity, and to such an extent, as the Christian was, both during our Saviour's lifetime, and after his death. For there is, I believe, no instance in the history of mankind of such an effect being produced, without either the one or the other. Now of force we know that Jesus never did make use; the unavoidable consequence is, that the miracles ascribed to him were actually wrought by him.

4. These miracles being wrought, not in the midst of friends, who were disposed to favour them, but of most bitter and determined enemies, whose passions and whose prejudices were all up in arms, all vigorous and active against them and their author; we may rest assured that no false pretence to a supernatural power, no frauds, no collusions, no impositions, would be suffered to pass undetected and unexposed: that every single miracle would be most critically and most rigorously sifted and inquired into, and no art left unemployed to destroy their credit and counteract their effect. And this in fact we find to be the case. Look into the ninth chapter of St. John, and you will see with what extreme care and diligence, with what anxiety and solicitude, the pharisees examined and re-examined the blind man that was restored to

sight by our Saviour, and what pains they took to persuade him, and to make him say, that he was *not* restored to sight by Jesus.

“They brought,” says St. John, “to the pharisees, him that aforetime was blind; and the pharisees asked him how he had received his sight. And he said unto them, Jesus put clay upon mine eyes, and I washed and did see. A plain and simple and honest relation of the fact. But the Jews, not content with this, called for his parents, and asked them, saying, is this your son, who ye say was born blind? How then doth he now see? His parents, afraid of bringing themselves into danger, very discreetly answered, we know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but by what means he now seeth, we know not, or who hath opened his eyes we know not; he is of age, ask him, he shall speak for himself. They then called the man again, and said to him, give God the praise; we know that this man (meaning Jesus,) is a sinner. The man’s answer is admirable: Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not; but this I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see. Since the world began, was it not known that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing. And they answered him and said, thou wast altogether born in sin, and dost *thou* teach us? And they cast him out.” A very effectual way, it must be confessed, of confuting a miracle!

The whole of this narrative (from which I have only selected a few of the most striking passages) is highly curious and instructive, and would furnish ample matter for a variety of very important remarks. But the only use I mean to make of it at present is to observe, that it proves, in the clearest

manner, how very much awake and alive the Jews were to every part of our Saviour's conduct. It shows that his miracles were presented not to persons prepossessed and prejudiced in his favour, not to inattentive or negligent or credulous spectators, but to acute and inquisitive and hostile observers, to men disposed and able to detect imposture wherever it could be found. And it is utterly impossible that the miracles of Christ could have passed the fiery ordeal of so much shrewdness and sagacity, and authority and malignity, united, if they had not been carried through it by the irresistible force of truth, and of that divine power which nothing could resist.

5. The miracles of our Lord were not mere transient acts, beheld at the moment with astonishment, but forgot as soon as over, and productive of no important consequences. They gave birth to a new religion, to a new mode of worship, to several new and singular institutions, such as the rite of baptism, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the appropriation of the *first* day of the week to sacred purposes, the establishment of a distinct order of men for the celebration of divine offices, and other things of the same nature. Now this religion and these institutions subsist to this day. And as the books of the New Testament affirm that this religion and these institutions were first established, and afterward made their way by the power of miracles, they are standing testimonies to the truth and the reality of those miracles, without which they could never have taken such firm and deep root at the first, and continued unshaken through so many ages to the present time. The magnitude and permanency of the superstructure prove

that it could not have had a less solid, a less substantial foundation.

6. And, lastly, when we consider the great sacrifices made by the first converts to Christianity, particularly by the apostles and primitive teachers of it; how many deep-rooted prejudices and favourite opinions they gave up to it; what a total change it produced in their disposition, their temper, their manners, their principles, their habits, and the whole complexion of their lives; what infinite pains they took to propagate it; how cheerfully they relinquished for this purpose all the ease, the comfort, the conveniences, the pleasures, and the advantages of life; and instead of them embraced labours, hardships, sufferings, persecutions, torments, and death itself; we cannot rationally suppose that such patience, resignation, fortitude, magnanimity, and perseverance, could possibly be produced by any less powerful cause than those evidences of divine power exhibited in the miracles of Christ; which demonstrably proved that he and his religion had a divine original, and that therefore the sufferings they underwent for his sake in the present life would be amply repaid by the glorious rewards reserved for them hereafter.

When therefore we put together all these considerations, they can leave no doubt on any unprejudiced mind, that the account given in this chapter of the first commencement of our Saviour's ministry, and the reasons of his astonishing success, are perfectly accurate and true: namely, "that he went about all Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people."

And our conclusion from this must necessarily be the same with that of the great Jewish ruler, who, with a laudable anxiety to know the truth, came to Jesus by night, and addressed him in these words: “Rabbi, we *know* that thou art a teacher come from God: *for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him**.”

* John iii. 2.

the heathen world; and are still too much so, even to the Christian world. “There are (as a very able advocate for Christianity well observes*) two opposite characters under which mankind may generally be classed. The one possesses vigour, firmness, resolution, is daring and active, quick in its sensibilities, jealous of its fame, eager in its attachments, inflexible in its purposes, violent in its resentments.

“The other, meek, yielding, complying, forgiving: not prompt to act, but willing to suffer; silent and gentle under rudeness and insult; suing for reconciliation where others would demand satisfaction; giving way to the pushes of impudence; conceding and indulgent to the prejudices, the wrongheadedness, the intractability of those with whom he has to deal.”

The former of these characters is and ever has been the favourite of the world; and though it is too stern to conciliate affection, yet it has an appearance of dignity in it which too commonly commands respect.

The latter is, as our Lord describes it, humble, meek, lowly, devout, merciful, pure, peaceable, patient, and unresisting. The world calls it mean-spirited, tame, and abject; yet notwithstanding all this, with the divine author of our religion this is the favourite character; this is the constant topic of his commendation; this is the subject that runs through all the beatitudes. To this he assigns, under all its various forms, peculiar blessings. To those who possess it, he promises that they shall inherit the earth; that they shall obtain mercy; that theirs shall be the kingdom of heaven; that they shall see God, and shall be called the *children* of God.

The recommendation of this character recurs fre-

* Dr. Paley, vol. ii. p. 30.

quently in different shapes throughout the whole of the sermon on the mount, and a great part of that discourse is nothing more than a comment on the text of the beatitudes. On these, and a few other passages which have any thing particularly novel and important in them, I shall offer some observations.

But before I quit this noble and consolatory exordium of our Lord's discourse, I shall request your attention to one particular part of it, which seems to require a little explanation.

The part I allude to is this: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

The blessing, here promised to the meek, seems at first sight somewhat singular, and not very appropriate to the virtue recommended.

That the *meek* of all others should be destined to inherit the earth, is what one should not naturally have expected. If we may judge from what passes in the world, it is those of a quite opposite character, the bold, the forward, the active, the enterprising, the rapacious, the ambitious, that are best calculated to secure to themselves that inheritance. And, undoubtedly, if by inheriting the earth is meant acquiring the wealth, the grandeur, the power, the property of the earth, these are the persons who generally seize on a large proportion of those good things, and leave the meek and the gentle far behind them in this unequal contest for such advantages. But it was far other things than these our Lord had in view. By inheriting the earth, he meant inheriting those things which are, without question, the greatest *blessings* upon earth, calmness and composure of spirit, tranquillity, cheerfulness, peace and comfort of mind. Now these, I apprehend, are the peculiar portion and recompense

of the *meeke*. Unassuming, gentle, and humble in their deportment, they give no offence, they create no enemies, they provoke no hostilities, and thus escape all that large proportion of human misery which arises from dissensions and disputes. If differences *do* unexpectedly start up, by patience, mildness, and prudence, they disarm their adversaries, they soften resentment, they court reconciliation, and seldom fail of restoring harmony and peace. Having a very humble opinion of themselves, they see others succeed without uneasiness, without envy: having no ambition, no spirit of competition, they feel no pain from disappointment, no mortification from defeat. By bending under the storms that assail them, they greatly mitigate their violence, and see them pass over their heads almost without feeling their force. Content and satisfied with their lot, they pass quietly and silently through the crowds that surround them; and encounter much fewer difficulties and calamities in their progress through life, than more active and enterprising men. This even tenour of life may indeed be called, by men of the world, flat, dull, and insipid. But the meek are excluded from no rational pleasure, no legitimate delight; and as they are more exempt from anxiety and pain than other men, their sum total of happiness is greater, and they may, in the best sense of the word, be fairly said *to inherit the earth*.

I shall now proceed to notice such other passages of this admirable discourse, as appear to me to deserve peculiar attention and consideration.

The first of these is that which begins with the 21st verse; “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgement: but I say unto

you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgement; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; but whosoever shall say, thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire." And again in the same manner at the 27th verse; "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart."

I put these two instances together, because they both enforce the same great leading principle, and both illustrate one great distinguishing excellence of the morality taught by our Saviour; namely, that it does not content itself with merely controlling our outward actions, but it goes much deeper, it imposes its restraints, it places its guard exactly where it ought to do, on our thoughts and on our hearts. Our Lord here singles out two cases, referring to two different species of passions, the malevolent and the sensual; and he pronounces the same sentence, the same decisive judgement on both; that the thing to be regulated is the *intention*, the *passion*, the *propensity*. Former moralists contented themselves with saying, thou shalt not kill. But *I* (says our Lord) go much further; *I* say, thou shalt not indulge any *resentment* against thy brother, thou shalt not use any reproachful or contemptuous language towards him; for it is these things that lead and provoke to the most atrocious deeds. Former moralists have said, thou shalt not commit adultery. But *I* say, let not thine *heart* or thine *eye* commit adultery: for here it is that the sin begins: and here it must be crushed in its birth.

This is wisdom, this is morality in its most perfect form, in its essence, and in its first principles. Every one that is acquainted with men and manners must know that our Lord has here shown a consummate knowledge of human nature; that he has laid his finger on the right place, and exerted his authority where it was most wanted, in checking the first movements of our criminal desires. Every one must see and feel, that bad thoughts quickly ripen into bad actions; and that if the latter only are forbidden, and the former left free, all morality will soon be at an end. Our Lord, therefore, like a wise physician, goes at once to the bottom of the evil; he extirpates the first germ and root of the disease, and leaves not a single fibre of it remaining to shoot up again in the heart.

It was obvious to foresee that the disciples, and the people to whom our Saviour addressed himself, would consider this as very severe discipline, and would complain bitterly, or at least murmur secretly, at the hardships of parting with all their favourite passions, of eradicating their strongest natural propensities, of watching constantly every motion of their hearts, and guarding those issues of life and death, those fountains of virtue and of vice, with the most unremitting attention. But all this our divine Master tells them is indispensably necessary. All these cautions must be used, all this vigilance must be exercised, all this self-government must be exerted, all these sacrifices must be made. It is the price we are to pay, (besides that price which our Redeemer paid,) and surely no unreasonable one, for escaping eternal misery, and rendering ourselves capable of eternal glory. He therefore goes on to say, in terms highly

figurative and alarming, but not too strong for the occasion, "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee; for it is profitable for thee that *one* of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off and cast it from thee; for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell*." Every one must immediately see that the eye to be plucked out is the eye of concupiscence, and the hand to be cut off is the hand of violence and vengeance; that is, these passions are to be checked and subdued, let the conflict cost us what it may.

This naturally leads our divine teacher, in the next verse, to a subject closely connected with one of our strongest passions; and that is, the power of divorce. Among the Jews and the heathens, but more particularly the latter, this power was carried to a great extent, and exercised with the most capricious and wanton cruelty. The best and most affectionate of wives were often dismissed for the slightest reasons, and sometimes without any reason at all. It was high time for some stop to be put to these increasing barbarities, and it was a task worthy of the Son of God himself to stand up as the defender and protector of the weak, of the most helpless and most oppressed part of the human species. Accordingly he here declares, in the most positive terms, that the only legitimate cause of divorce is adultery. "It has been said, whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement. But I say unto you, whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit

* Matt. v. 29, 30.

adultery ; and whosoever marrieth her that is divorced, committeth adultery*.” This has, by the experience of ages, been found to be a most wise and salutary provision, and no less conducive to the happiness than to the virtue of mankind. And we are taught by the fatal example of other nations, that wherever this law of the gospel has been abrogated or relaxed, and a greater facility of divorce allowed, the consequence has constantly been a too visible depravation of manners, and the destruction of many of the most essential comforts of the married state.

The passage to which I shall next advert is the following: “Ye have heard it has been said, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But *I* say unto you, that ye resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also; and whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain †.’

By the Mosaic law, retaliation was permitted; an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth, might *legally* be demanded ‡. Among the ancient heathens, private revenge was indulged without scruple and without mercy. The savage nations in America, as well as in almost every other part of the world, set no bounds to the persevering rancour, and the cool deliberate malignity, with which they will pursue, for years together, not only the person himself from whom they have received an injury, but sometimes every one related to or connected with him. The Arabs are equally implacable in their resentments; and the Koran itself, in the case of murder, allows private revenge §.

* Matt. v. 31, 32.

† Matt. v. 38—41.

‡ Levit. xxiv. 20. Deut. xix. 21.

§ Koran, v. 2 c. 17. p. 100.

It was to check this furious ungovernable passion, so universally prevalent over the earth, that our Saviour delivered the precepts now before us. "I say unto you, resist not evil; but if any one smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." No one can imagine that this injunction, and those of the same kind that follow, are to be understood strictly and literally; that we are to submit, without the least opposition, to every injury and every insult that is offered to us, and are absolutely precluded from every degree of self-preservation and self-defence. This can never be intended; and the example of St. Paul, who repelled with proper spirit the insult offered him as a Roman citizen, very clearly proves that we are not to permit ourselves to be trampled on by the foot of pride and oppression, without expressing a just sense of the injury done to us, and endeavouring to avert and repel it. It cannot therefore be meant, that if any one, by a cruel and expensive litigation, should deprive us of a part of our property, we should not only relinquish to him that part, but request him also to accept every thing else we have in the world. Nor can it be meant, that if a man should actually strike us on one cheek, we should immediately turn to him the other, and desire the blow to be repeated. This could not possibly answer any one rational purpose, nor conduce in the least to the peace and happiness of mankind, which were certainly the objects our Saviour had in view; on the contrary, it would tend materially to obstruct both, by inviting injury, and encouraging insult and oppression. Common sense therefore, as well as common utility, require that we should consider the particular instances of behaviour under the injuries here specified, as

nothing more than strong oriental idioms, as proverbial and figurative expressions, intended only to convey a general precept, and to describe that peculiar *temper* and *disposition* which the gospel requires; that patience, gentleness, mildness, moderation, and forbearance, under injuries and affronts, which is best calculated to preserve the peace of our own minds, as well as that of the world at large; which tends to soften resentment and turn away wrath; and without which, on one side or the other, provocations must be endless, and enmities eternal.

All therefore that is here required of us is plainly and simply this, that we should not suffer our resentment of injuries to carry us beyond the bounds of justice, equity, and Christian charity; that we should not (as St. Paul well explains this passage,) *recompense evil for evil**, that is, repay one injury by committing another; that we should not take fire at every slight provocation or trivial offence, nor pursue even the greatest and most flagrant injuries with implacable fury and inextinguishable rancour; that we should make all reasonable allowances for the infirmities of human nature, for the passions, the prejudices, the failings, the misapprehensions, of those we have to deal with; and, without submitting tamely to oppression or insult, or giving up rights of *great and acknowledged importance*, should always show a disposition to conciliate and forgive; and rather to recede and give way a little in certain instances, than insist on the *utmost* satisfaction and reparation that we have perhaps a strict right to demand.

The chapter concludes with another remarkable precept, which may strictly be called a *new*

* Rom. xii. 17.

commandment; for in no moral code is it to be found, till our Lord gave it a place in his.

The precept is this: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But *I* say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust*."

So noble, so sublime, and so benevolent a precept, was never before given to man; and it is one strong proof, among many others, of the originality of our Saviour's character and religion.

The Jews were expressly commanded to love their neighbour; but this injunction was not extended to their enemies, and they therefore thought that this was a tacit permission to *hate* them; a conclusion which seemed to be much strengthened by their being enjoined to wage eternal war with one of their enemies, the Canaanites, to show them no mercy, but to root them out of the land. In consequence of this, they *did* entertain strong prejudices and malignant sentiments towards every other nation but their own, and were justly reproached for this by the Roman historian; "apud ipsos misericordia in promptu, adversus omnes alios hostile odium†:" that is, towards each other they are compassionate and kind; towards all others they cherish a deadly hatred. But it ought in justice to be observed, that this remark of Tacitus might have been applied, with almost equal aptitude, both to his own countrymen the Romans, and

* Matt. v. 43—45.

† Tacit. Hist. v. 5.

to the Greeks, for they gave to all other nations but themselves the name of barbarians; and having stigmatized them with this opprobrious appellation, they treated them as if they were in reality what they had wantonly thought fit to call them. They treated them with insolence, contempt, and cruelty. They created and carried on unceasing hostilities against them, and never sheathed the sword till they had exterminated or enslaved them.

In private life also, it was thought allowable to pursue those with whom they were at variance with the keenest resentment and most implacable hatred; to take every opportunity of annoying and distressing them, and not to rest till they had felt the severest effects of unrelenting vengeance.

In this situation of the world, and in this general ferment of the malevolent passions, how seasonable, how salutary, how kind, how conciliatory, was the command to love, not only our friends, not only our neighbours, not only strangers, but even our enemies! How gracious that injunction, “*I say unto you, love your enemies; do good to them that hate you, bless them that curse you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you!*” And how touching, how irresistible, is the argument used to enforce it: “*That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust!*”

It is remarkable, that the philosopher Seneca makes use of the same argument, not exactly for the same purpose, but for a similar one: “*If (says he) you would imitate the gods, confer favours even on the ungrateful, for the sun rises on the wicked, and the*

seas are open even unto pirates:” and again, “the gods show many acts of kindness even to the ungrateful*.” It is highly probable that the philosopher took this sentiment from this very passage of St. Matthew; for no such sublime morality is, I believe, to be found in any heathen writer *previous* to the Christian revelation.

Seneca flourished and wrote after the gospels were written, and after Christianity had made some progress. Besides this, he was brother to Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia, before whose tribunal, St. Paul was brought by the Jews at Corinth†. From him he would of course receive much information respecting this new religion, and the principal characters concerned in it; and from the extraordinary things he would hear of it from such authentic sources, his curiosity would naturally be excited to look a little further into it, and to peruse the writings that contained the history and the doctrines of this new school of philosophy. This, and this only, can account for the fine strains of morality we sometimes meet with in Seneca, Plutarch, Marcus Antoninus, Epictetus, and the other philosophers who wrote after the Christian æra, and the visible superiority of *their* ethics to those of their predecessors before that period. But to return.

It has been objected to this command of *loving our enemies*, that it is extravagant and impracticable; that it is impossible for any man to bring himself to entertain any real love for his enemies; and that human nature revolts and recoils against so unreasonable a requisition.

This objection evidently goes upon the supposition

* Sen. de Benef. lib. 4. c. 26 and c. 28.

† Acts, xviii. 12.

that we are to love our enemies in the same manner and degree, and with the same cordiality and ardour of affection, that we do our relations and friends. And if this were required, it might indeed be considered as a harsh injunction. But our Lord was not so severe a task-master as to expect this at our hands. There are different degrees of love, as well as of every other human affection; and these degrees are to be duly proportioned to the different objects of our regard. There is one degree due to our relations, another to our benefactors, another to our friends, another to strangers, another to our enemies. There is no need to define the precise shades and limits of each, our own feelings will save us that trouble; and in that only case where our feelings are likely to lead us wrong, this precept of our Lord will direct us right.

And it exacts nothing but what is both reasonable and practicable. It explains what is meant by *loving* our enemies, in the words that immediately follow: "Bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you:" that is, do not *retaliate* upon your enemy; do not return his execrations, his injuries, and his persecutions, with similar treatment; do not turn upon him his own weapons, but endeavour to subdue him with weapons of a celestial temper, with kindness and compassion. This is of all others the most effectual way of vanquishing an enraged adversary. The interpretation here given, is amply confirmed by St. Paul in his epistle to the Romans, which is an admirable comment on this passage. "Dearly beloved," says he, "avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore, if thine enemy

hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good*." This then is the *love* that we are to show our enemies; not that ardour of affection which we feel towards our friends, but that lower kind of *love*, which is called Christian charity (for it is the same word in the original) and which we ought to exercise towards every human being, especially in distress. If even our enemy hunger, we are to feed him; if he thirst, we are to give him drink; and thus shall obtain the noblest of all triumphs, "we shall overcome evil with good." The world if they please may call this meanness of spirit; but it is in fact the truest magnanimity and elevation of soul. It is far more glorious and more difficult to subdue our own resentments, and to act with generosity and kindness to our adversary, than to make him feel the severest effects of our vengeance. It is this noblest act of self-government, this conquest over our strongest passions, which our Saviour here requires. It is what constitutes the highest perfection of our nature; and it is this *perfection* which is meant in the concluding verse of this chapter; "Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect†;" that is, in your conduct towards your enemies approach as near as you are able to that perfection of mercy which your heavenly Father manifests towards *his* enemies, towards the evil and the unjust, on whom he maketh his sun to rise as well as on the righteous and the just. This sense of the word *perfect* is established beyond controversy by the parallel passage in St Luke; where, instead of the terms made use of by St. Matthew, "Be ye therefore *perfect*, as your Father which is in heaven is

* Rom. xii. 19—21.

† Matt. v. 48.

perfect," the evangelist expressly says, "Be ye therefore *merciful*, as your Father also is merciful*."

This then is the perfection which you are to exert your utmost efforts to attain; and if you succeed in your attempt, your reward shall be great indeed; you shall, as our Lord assures you, be the *children of the Most High*†.

HAVING now brought these Lectures to a conclusion for the present year, I cannot take my leave of you without expressing the great comfort and satisfaction I have derived from the appearance of such numerous and attentive congregations as I have seen in this place. That satisfaction, if I can at all judge of my own sentiments and feelings, does not originate from any selfish gratification, but from the real interest I take in the welfare, the eternal welfare, of every one here present; from the hope I entertain that some useful impressions may have been made upon your minds; and from the evidence which this general earnestness to hear the word of God explained and recommended affords, that a deeper sense of duty, a more serious attention to the great concerns of eternity, has, by the blessing of God, been awakened in your souls. If this be so, allow me most earnestly to entreat you not to let this ardour cool; not to let these pious sentiments die away; not to let these good seeds be choked by the returning cares and pleasures of the world. But go, retire into your closets, fall down upon your knees before your Maker, and fervently implore him to pour down upon you the overruling influences of his Holy Spirit; to enlighten your understandings, to sanctify your hearts, to subdue your passions, to confirm your good

* Luke vi. 36.

† Matt. v. 45.

resolutions, and enable you to resist every enemy of your salvation.

The world will soon again display all its attractions before you, and endeavour to extinguish every good principle you have imbibed. But if the divine truths you have heard explained and enforced in these Lectures have taken any firm root in your minds; if you are seriously convinced that Christ and his religion came from heaven, and that he is able to make good whatever he has promised and whatever he has threatened, there is nothing surely in this world that can induce you to risk the loss of eternal happiness, or the infliction of never-ceasing punishment.

Least of all will you think that this is the precise moment for setting your affections on this world and its enjoyments; that these are the times for engaging in eager pursuits after the advantages, the honours, the pleasures, of the present life; for plunging into vice, for dissolving in gaiety and pleasure, for suffering every trivial, every insignificant object, to banish the remembrance of your Maker and Redeemer from your hearts, where they ought to reign unrivalled and supreme. Surely amidst the dark clouds that now hang over us*, these are *not* the things that will brighten up our prospects, that will lessen our danger, that will calm our apprehensions, and speak peace and comfort to our souls. No, it must be something of a very different nature; a deep sense of our own unworthiness, a sincere contrition for our past offences, a prostration of ourselves in all humility before the throne of grace, an earnest application for pardon and acceptance through the merits of Him who died for us, (whose death and sufferings for our sakes the approaching

* In March, 1798.

week will bring fresh before our view,) an ardent desire to manifest our love and gratitude, our devotion and attachment to our Maker and our Redeemer, by giving them a decided priority and predominance in our affections and our hearts; by making their will the ruling principle of our conduct; the attainment of their favour, the advancement of their glory, the chief object of our wishes and desires. These are the sentiments we ought to cultivate and cherish if we wish for any solid comfort under calamity or affliction, any confidence in the favour and protection of heaven; these alone can support and sustain our souls in the midst of danger and distress, at the hour of death, and in the day of judgement.

And how then are these holy sentiments, these heavenly affections, to be excited in our hearts? Most certainly not by giving up all our time and all our thoughts to the endless occupations, the never-ceasing gaieties and amusements of this dissipated metropolis; but by withdrawing ourselves frequently from this tumultuous scene, by retiring into our chamber, by communing with our own hearts, by fervent prayer, by holding high converse with our Maker, and cultivating some acquaintance with that unseen world to which we are all hastening, and which, in one way or other, must be our portion for ever.

Many of those whom I now see before me have, from their high rank and situation in life, full leisure and ample opportunities for all these important purposes; and let them be assured, that a strict account will one day be demanded of them in what manner and with what effect they have employed the talents, the time, and the many other advantages with which their gracious Maker has indulged them.

And even those who are most engaged in the busy and laborious scenes of life, have at least *one* day in the week which they may, and which they ought to dedicate to the great concerns of religion. Let then *that* day be kept sacred to its original destination by all ranks of men, from the highest to the lowest. Let it not be profaned by needless journeys, by splendid entertainments, by crowded assemblies, by any thing in short which precludes either ourselves, our families, or our domestics, from the exercise of religious duties, or the improvement of those pious sentiments and affections which it was meant to inspire. Let me not, however, be misunderstood. I mean not that it should be either to the rich or the poor, or to any human being whatever, a day of gloom and melancholy, a day of superstitious rigour, and of absolute exclusion from all society and all innocent recreation. I know of nothing in scripture that requires this; I know of no good effects that could result from it. On the contrary, it is a festival, a *joyful* festival; a day to which we ought always to look forward with delight, and enjoy with a thankful and a grateful heart. But let it be remembered at the same time, that it is a day which God claims as *his own*; that he has stamped upon it a peculiar mark of sanctity; and that it ought to be distinguished from every other day, in the first place, by resting from our usual occupations, and giving rest to our servants and our cattle; in the next, by attendance on the public worship of God; and in the remaining intervals, by relaxations and enjoyments *peculiarly its own*; not by quotidian tumult, noise, and dissipation; but by the calm and silent pleasures of retirement, of recollection, of devout meditation, of secret prayer, yet mingled discreetly with select society, with friend-

ly converse, with sober recreation, and with decent cheerfulness throughout the whole.

It was to draw off our attention from the common follies and vanities of the week, and to give the soul a little pause, a little respite, a little breathing from incessant importunities of business and of pleasure, that this holy festival was instituted. And if we cannot give up these things for a *single* day, if we cannot make this small sacrifice to Him from whom we derive our very existence, it is high time for us to look to our hearts, and to consider very seriously whether such a disposition and temper of mind as this will ever qualify us for the kingdom of Heaven.

“ Could ye not watch with me *one* hour ?” said our divine Master to his slumbering companions*. Can ye not give me *one* day out of seven ? may he now say to his thoughtless disciples. Let none of us then ever subject ourselves to this bitter reproach. Let us resolve from this moment to make the Christian sabbath a day of holy joy and consolation ; a day of heavenly rest and refreshment ; and above all, a day for the attentive perusal of those sacred pages which have been the subject of these Lectures, and of your most serious attention. It is to be hoped, indeed, that we shall not confine our religion and our devotion to that day only ; but even *that* day, properly employed, will in some degree sanctify all the rest. It will disengage us (at it was meant to do,) gradually and gently from that world, which we must soon (perhaps sooner than we imagine) quit for ever ; it will raise our thoughts above the low and trivial pursuits of the present scene, and fix them on nobler and worthier objects ; it will refine and purify, exalt and spiritualize our

* Mark xiv. 37.

affections; will bring us nearer and nearer to God, and to the world of spirits; and thus lead us on to that CELESTIAL SABBATH, that EVERLASTING REST, for which the Christian sabbath was meant to prepare and to harmonize our souls.

LECTURE VII.



MATTHEW, CHAP. VI. AND VII.

IN these two chapters our Lord continues and concludes his admirable discourse from the Mount.

The first thing to be noticed here is a strong and repeated caution to avoid all show and ostentation in the performance of our religious duties.

The three instances specified are the acts of giving alms, of praying, and of fasting.

The direction with regard to the first is, “Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them, otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues, and in the streets, that they may have glory of men; verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But when *thou* doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth, that thine alms may be in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly*.”

In the same manner, with regard to prayer; the rule is, “When thou prayest thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are, for they love to pray standing in the

* Matt. vi. 1—4.

synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men ; verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But thou, when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret ; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly*.”

Lastly, a similar precaution applies also to the act of fasting ; “ When ye fast, be not as the hypocrites of a sad countenance, for they disfigure their faces that they may appear unto men to fast ; verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head and wash thy face, that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret ; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly †.”

In all these passages the point to be noticed is a strong and marked disapprobation of every thing that looks like ostentation, parade, vain-glory, insincerity, or hypocrisy, in the discharge of our Christian duties. They show in the clearest light the spirit and temper of the Christian religion, which is modest, silent, retired, quiet, unobtrusive, shunning the observation and the applause of men, and looking only to the approbation of Him who seeth every thought of our hearts, and every secret motive of our actions.

They establish this as the grand principle of action for every disciple of Christ, that in every part of his moral and religious conduct he is to have no other object in view but the *favour of God*. This is the motive from which all his virtues are to flow. If he is actuated by any other ; if he courts the applause of the world, or is ambitious to acquire, by a show of piety, a character of sanctity, among men, he may perhaps

* Matt. vi. 5, 6.

† Ibid. vi. 16—18.

gain his point; but it is *all* he will gain. He will have his reward here; he must expect none hereafter.

Having made this general observation upon the whole, I shall now proceed to remark on the particular instances adduced, in order to establish the leading principle.

And first, we are directed to give our alms so privately, that (as our Lord most emphatically and elegantly expresses it) “our left hand shall not know what our right hand doeth.” This evidently implies the utmost secrecy in the distribution of our charity; and this is undoubtedly the rule we are in general to observe. But it is by no means to be inferred from hence that we are never, on any occasion, to give our alms in public. In some cases, publicity is so far from being culpable, that it is necessary, useful, and laudable. In contributing, for instance, to any public charity, or to the relief of some great calamity, private or public, we cannot well conceal our beneficence, or if we could we ought not. Our example may induce many others to exert a similar generosity; and besides this there are persons in certain situations who are expected to be charitable, and who should give proofs to the world that they are so. And accordingly in these and in such like cases we are required to make our “light so shine before men, that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven*.” As far therefore as the *reason* of this command goes, it is not only allowable, but our duty, to let our generous deeds be *sometimes* known to the world. But then we ought to take especial care at the same time that we bestow a much *larger* proportion of our alms in secrecy and in silence; that we suffer no one

* Matt. v. 16.

to witness our beneficence but Him who *must* see every thing we do, and that we have no other object whatever in view but his approbation, and his immortal rewards.

The next instance adduced to confirm the general principle of seeking the approbation not of men but of God, is that of prayer.

“ When thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are, for *they* love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men ; verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut the door, pray to thy Father which is in secret ; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.”

This passage has been made use of by some writers as an argument against all *public* prayer, which they say is here plainly prohibited. But for this there is not the smallest foundation. It is of *private* prayer only that our Lord is here speaking ; and the hypocrites whom he condemns were those ostentatious Jews who performed those devotions which ought to have been confined to the closet, in the synagogues, and even in the public streets, that they might be noticed and applauded for their extraordinary piety and sanctity. But this reproof could not possibly mean to extend to *public* devotions in places of worship. This is evident from the *corners of streets* being mentioned ; for those are places in which public devotions are never performed. But besides this, we find in scripture that public worship is enjoined as a duty of the highest importance. It made a considerable part of the Jewish religion, and the Mosaic law is filled with precepts and directions concerning it. God de-

clares by the prophet Isaiah, “ that his house shall be called a house of prayer for *all* people*.” Our Saviour quotes these very words when he cast out those that polluted the temple; and was himself a constant frequenter of divine worship, both in the temple and in the synagogues. He taught his disciples (as we shall soon see) a form of prayer, which, though very proper to be used by any single person in private, yet is throughout expressed in the plural number, and adapted to the use of several persons praying at the same time. “ If two of you,” says he to his disciples on another occasion, “ shall agree on earth touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven; for where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them†.” By St. Paul we are commanded “ not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is‡.” And we find, that after our Saviour’s ascension, his followers “ continued stedfastly in the apostle’s doctrine and fellowship, and in prayer and supplication, praising God, and having favour with all the people §.”

It is therefore incontestably clear that our Saviour could not possibly mean to forbid that public worship which he himself practised and commanded. His intentions could only be to confine our private prayers to private places, in which we are to keep up a secret intercourse with our Maker, withdrawn from the eye of the world, and unobserved by any other than that Almighty Being to whom our petitions are addressed.

The last instance produced by our Saviour is that of fasting. “ When ye fast, be not as the hypocrites

* Isaiah lvi. 7.

† Heb. x. 25.

‡ Matt. xviii. 19, 20.

§ Acts ii. 42, 47.

of a sad countenance, for they disfigure their faces that they may appear unto men to fast; verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head and wash thy face, that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.”

There is very little necessity to dwell on this precept here, for there are scarce any in these times and in this country who seem disposed to make a *show* of fasting, or to be ambitious of acquiring a reputation for that kind of religious discipline; on the contrary, it is by great numbers entirely laid aside, and too frequently treated with derision and contempt. Yet from this very passage we may learn that it ought to be considered in a much more serious light; for although our Saviour did not command his disciples to fast whilst he was with them, yet he himself fasted for forty days. He here plainly supposes that his disciples did sometimes fast; and gives them directions how to perform that duty in a manner acceptable to God. And it appears also, that if they did so perform it, if they fasted without any ostentation or parade, with a design not to catch the applause of men, but to approve themselves to God, he assured them *they should have their reward*.

Before we quit this division of the chapter, we must go back a little to that admirable form of prayer which our Lord gave to his disciples, after cautioning them against all ostentation in their devotions.

This prayer stands unrivalled in every circumstance that constitutes the perfection of prayer, and the excellence of that species of composition. It is concise, it is perspicuous, it is solemn, it is comprehensive, it

is adapted to all ranks, conditions, and classes of men; it fixes our thoughts on a few great important points, and impresses on our minds a deep sense of the goodness and the greatness of that Almighty Being to whom it is addressed.

It begins with acknowledging him to be our most gracious and merciful Father; it begs that his name may every where be revered, that his religion may spread over the earth, and that his will may be obeyed by men with the same ardour and alacrity and constancy that it is by the angels in heaven. It next entreats the supply of all our essential wants, both temporal and spiritual; a sufficiency of those things that are absolutely necessary for our subsistence; the forgiveness of our transgressions, on condition that we forgive our brethren; and, finally, support under the temptations that assault our virtue, and deliverance from the various evils and calamities that every where surround us; expressing at the same time the utmost trust and confidence in the power of God, to grant whatever he sees it expedient and proper for his creatures to receive.

The full meaning then of this admirable prayer, and of the several petitions contained in it, may perhaps be not improperly expressed in the following manner:

O thou great Parent of the universe, our Creator, our Preserver and continual Benefactor, grant that we and all reasonable creatures may entertain just and worthy notions of thy nature and attributes, may fear thy power, admire thy wisdom, adore thy goodness, rely upon thy truth; may reverence thy holy name, may bless and praise thee, may worship and obey thee.

Grant that all the nations of the earth may come to

the knowledge and belief of thy holy religion; that it may every where produce the blessed fruits of piety, righteousness, charity, and sobriety; that, by a constant endeavour to obey thy holy laws, we may approach, as near as the infirmity of our nature will allow, to the more perfect obedience of the angels that are in heaven; and thus qualify ourselves for entering into thy kingdom of glory hereafter.

Feed us, we beseech thee, with food convenient for us. We ask not for riches and honours; give us only what is necessary for our comfortable subsistence in the several stations which thy providence has allotted to us; and, above all, give us contented minds.

We are all, O Lord, the very best of us, miserable sinners. Be not extreme, we beseech thee, to mark what we have done amiss, but pity our infirmities, and pardon our offences. Yet let us not dare to implore forgiveness from thee, unless we also from our hearts forgive our offending brethren.

We are surrounded, on every side, with temptations to sin; and such is the corruption and frailty of our nature, that without thy powerful succour we cannot always stand upright. Take us then, O gracious God, under thy almighty protection; and, amidst all the dangers and difficulties of our Christian warfare, be thou our refuge and support. Suffer us not to be tempted above what we are able to bear, but send thy Holy Spirit to strengthen our own weak endeavours, and enable us to escape or to subdue all the enemies of our salvation.

Preserve us also, if it be thy blessed will, not only from spiritual, but from temporal evil. Keep us ever by thy watchful providence, both outwardly in our bodies, and inwardly in our souls; that, thou being in

all cases our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, as finally to lose not the things eternal.

Hear us, O Lord our Governor, from heaven thy dwelling place; and when thou hearest, have regard to our petitions. They are offered up to thee in the fullest confidence that thy goodness will dispose, and thy power enable thee to grant whatever thy wisdom sees to be convenient for us, and conducive to our final happiness.

The next thing which peculiarly demands our attention in this chapter is the declaration contained in the 24th verse, which presents to us another fundamental principle of the Christian religion; namely, the necessity of giving the *first* place in our hearts and our affections to God and religion, and pursuing other things only in subordination to those great objects. “No man,” says our Lord, “can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon*.”

The word mammon is generally interpreted to mean *riches* only; but the original rather directs us to take it in a more general sense, as comprehending every thing that is capable of being an object of *trust* or a ground of *confidence* to men of worldly minds; such as wealth, power, honour, fame, business, sensual pleasures, gay amusements, and all the other various pursuits of the present scene. It is these that constitute what we usually express by the word *world*, when opposed to religion. Here then are the two masters, who claim dominion over us, God and the world; and one of these we *must* serve; both we cannot, because

* Matt. vi. 24.

their dispositions and their commands are in general diametrically opposite to each other. The world invites us to indulge all our appetites without controul; to entangle ourselves in the cares and distractions of business; to engage with eagerness in endless contests for superiority in power, wealth, and honour; or to give up ourselves, body and soul, to gaiety, amusement, pleasure, and every kind of luxurious indulgence. These are the services which *one* master requires. But there is another master, whose injunctions are of a very different nature. That master is GOD; and *his* commands are, to give him our hearts; to love him with all our heart, and soul, and mind, and strength; to be temperate in all things; to make our moderation known unto all men; to fix our affections on things above; to have our conversation in heaven; to cast all our care upon him; and to take up our cross and follow Christ.

Judge now whether it be possible to serve these two masters at one and the same time, and to obey the commands of each; commands so perfectly contradictory to each other.

Yet this is what a great part of mankind most absurdly attempt; endeavour to divide themselves between God and mammon, to compromise the matter as well as they can between the commands of one and the seductions of the other; to vibrate perpetually between vice and virtue, between piety and pleasure, between inclination and duty; to render a worldly life and a religious life consistent with each other; and to take as much as they can of the enjoyments and advantages of the present world, without losing their hold on the rewards of the next.

Yet, in direct contradiction to so extravagant and

preposterous a system as this, Christ himself assures us here that we cannot serve two masters; that we cannot serve God and mammon. Our Maker expects to reign absolute in our hearts; he will not be served by halves; he will not accept of a divided empire, he will not suffer us to halt between two opinions. We must take our choice, and adhere to one side or the other. "If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him*."

But what then are we to do? Are we to live in a state of perpetual warfare and hostility with that very world in which the hand of Providence has placed us, and which is prepared in various ways for our reception and accommodation? Are we never to taste of those various delights which our Maker has poured so bountifully around us? Are we never to indulge those appetites which he himself has planted in our breasts? Are we so entirely to confine ourselves to the paths of righteousness, as never to enter those that lead to power, to honour, to wealth, or to fame? Are we to engage in no secular occupations, to make no provision for ourselves and our families? Are we altogether to withdraw ourselves from the cares and business and distractions of the world, and give ourselves wholly up to solitude, meditation, and prayer? Are we never to mingle in the cheerful amusements of society? Are we not to indulge ourselves in the refined pleasures of literary pursuits, nor wander even for a moment into the delightful regions of science or imagination?

Were this a true picture of our duties, and of the sacrifices which Christianity requires from us; were these the commands of our divine Lawgiver, well might

* 1 Kings, xviii. 21.

we say with the astonished disciples, “ who then can be saved ?”

But the God whom we serve is not so hard a master, nor does his religion contain any such severe restrictions as these. Christianity forbids no necessary occupations, no reasonable indulgences, no innocent relaxations. It allows us to use the world, provided we do not abuse it. It does not spread before us a delicious banquet, and then come with a “ touch not, taste not, handle not*.” All it requires is, that our liberty degenerate not into licentiousness, our amusements into dissipation, our industry into incessant toil, our carefulness into extreme anxiety and endless solicitude. So far from forbidding us to engage in business, it expressly commands us not to be slothful in it †, and to labour with our hands for the things that be needful; it enjoins every one to abide in the calling wherein he was called ‡, and perform all the duties of it. It even stigmatizes those that provide not for their own, with telling them, that they are worse than infidels §. When it requires us “ to be temperate || in all things,” it plainly tells us that we *may* use *all* things temperately; when it directs us “ to make our moderation known unto all men ¶,” this evidently implies, that within the bounds of moderation we may enjoy all the reasonable conveniences and comforts of the present life.

But how then are we to reconcile this participation in the concerns of the present life, with those very strong declarations of scripture, “ that we are not to be conformed to this world; that the friendship of the world is enmity with God; that we are to take *no*

* Coloss. ii. 21.

† Rom. xii. 11.—1 Cor. iv. 12.

‡ 1 Cor. vii. 20.

§ 1 Tim. v. 8.

|| 1 Cor. ix. 25.

¶ Philipp. iv. 5.

thought for the morrow; that we are to lay up treasures no where but in heaven; that we are to pray without ceasing; that we are to do *all* things to the glory of God; that we are not only to leave father, mother, brethren, and sisters, for the sake of Christ and his gospel, but that if we do not *hate* all these near and dear connexions, and even our own lives, we cannot be his disciples*.”

These, it must be acknowledged, are very strong expressions, and, taken in their strict literal sense, do certainly imply that we are to abandon every thing that is most dear and valuable and delightful to us in this life, and to devote ourselves so entirely to the contemplation and love and worship of God, as not to bestow a single thought on any thing else, or to give ourselves the smallest concern about the affairs of this sublunary state.

But can any one imagine this to be the *real* doctrine of scripture? You may rest assured, that nothing so unreasonable and extravagant is to be fairly deduced from these sacred writings.

In order then to clear up this most important point, three things are to be considered:

First, That were these injunctions to be understood in their literal signification, it would be utterly impossible for us to continue a week longer in the world. If, for instance, we were bound to pray without ceasing, and to take no thought whatever for the morrow, we must all of us quickly perish for want of the common necessaries of life.

2dly, It must be observed that all oriental writers, both sacred and profane, are accustomed to express

* Rom. xii. 2. Jam. iv. 4. Matt. vi. 20, 34. 1 Thes. v. 17. Ephes. vi. 18. 1 Cor. x. 31. Luke, xiv. 26.

themselves in bold ardent figures and metaphors, which, before their true meaning can be ascertained, require very considerable abatements, restrictions, and limitations.

3dly, What is most of all to the purpose, these abatements are almost constantly pointed out by scripture itself; and whenever a very strong and forcible idiom is made use of, you will generally find it explained and modified by a different expression of the same sentiment, which either immediately follows or occurs in some other passage of scripture.

Thus, in the present instance, when Christ says, “ye cannot serve God and mammon; therefore take no thought for your life what ye shall eat and what ye shall drink, nor yet for your body what ye shall put on:” this is most clearly explained a few verses after in these words: “seek ye *first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you*.” The meaning therefore of the precept is evidently this; not that we are absolutely to take no thought for our life, and the means of supporting it; but that our thoughts are not to be *wholly* or *principally* occupied with these things. We are not to indulge an immoderate and unceasing anxiety and solicitude about them; for that indeed is the true meaning of the original word *μεριμναω*. In our English Bible, that word is translated *take no thought*; but at the time when our translation was made, that expression signified only *be not too careful*. Our hearts, as it is expressed in another place, are not to be *overcharged* with the cares of this life†, so as to exclude all other concerns, even those of religion.

In the same manner with respect to pleasures,

* Matt. vi. 25. 33.

† Luke, xxi. 34.

we are not forbid to have *any* love for them; we are only commanded not to be lovers of pleasure *more* than lovers of God*.

When therefore it is said, ye cannot serve God and mammon, the point contended for in respect to God is not exclusive *possession*, but exclusive *dominion*. Other things may occasionally for a certain time, and to a certain degree, have possession of our minds, but they must not *rule*, they must not *reign* over them. We cannot serve two masters; we can serve but one faithfully and effectually, and that one must be God. The concerns and comforts of this life may have their *due* place in our hearts, but they must not aspire to the *first*; this is the prerogative of religion alone; religion must be supreme and paramount over all. Every one, it has been often said, has his ruling passion. The ruling passion of the Christian must be the love of his Maker and Redeemer. This it is which must *principally* occupy his thoughts, his time, his attention, his heart. If there be any thing else which has gained the ascendancy over our souls, on which our desires, our wishes, our hopes, our fears, are *chiefly* fixed, God is then dispossessed of his rightful dominion over us; we serve another master, and we shall think but little of our Maker, or any thing belonging to him.

His empire over our hearts must in short at all events be maintained. When this point is once secured, every inferior gratification that is consistent with his sovereignty, his glory, and his commands, is perfectly allowable; every thing that is hostile to them must at once be renounced.

This is a plain rule, and a very important one. It is the principle which our blessed Lord meant here to

* 2 Tim. iii. 4.

establish, and it must be the governing principle of our lives.

Next to this in importance is another command, which you will find in the 12th verse of the seventh chapter; “all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets.” As the former precepts which we have been considering relate to God, this relates to man; it is the grand rule, by which we must in all cases regulate our conduct towards our neighbour; and it is a rule, plain, simple, concise, intelligible, comprehensive, and every way worthy of its divine Author. Whenever we are deliberating how we ought to act towards our neighbour in any particular instance, we must for a moment change situations with him in our own minds, we must place him in our circumstances, and ourselves in his, and then whatever we should wish him to do to us, *that* we are to do to him. This is a process, in which, if we act fairly and impartially, we can never be mistaken. Our own feelings will determine our conduct at once better than all the casuists in the world.

But before we entirely quit the consideration of this precept, we must take some notice of the observation subjoined to it, which will require a little explanation.

“Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets.”

The concluding clause, *this is the law and the prophets*, has by some been interpreted to mean, this is the sum and substance of all religion; as if religion consisted solely in behaving justly and kindly to our fellow-creatures, and beyond this no other duty was

required at our hands. But this conclusion is as groundless as it is dangerous and unscriptural.

There are duties surely of another order, equally necessary at least, and equally important with those we owe to our neighbour.

There are duties, in the first place, owing to our Creator, whom we are bound to honour, to venerate, to worship, to obey, and to love with all our hearts and souls, and mind, and strength. There are duties owing to our Redeemer, of affection, attachment, gratitude, faith in his divine mission, and reliance on the atonement he made for us on the cross. There are, lastly, acts of discipline and self-government to be exercised over our corrupt propensities and irregular desires. Accordingly in the very chapter we have just been considering, we are commanded to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. We are in another place informed, that the love of God is the first and great commandment, and the love of our neighbour only the second; and we are taught by St. James, that one main branch of religion is to keep ourselves unspotted from the world*. It is impossible therefore that our blessed Lord could here mean to say, that our duty towards our neighbour was the whole of his religion; he says nothing in fact of *his* religion; he speaks only of the Jewish religion, *the law and the prophets*, and of these he only says, that one of the great objects they have in view, is to inculcate that same equitable conduct towards our brethren which he here recommended †.

Let no one then indulge the vain imagination, that a just, and generous, and compassionate conduct to-

* James, i. 27.

† See chap. xxii. 40. Rom. xiii. 8. Gal. v. 14. and Grotius on this verse.

wards his fellow-creatures constitutes the *whole* of his duty, and will compensate for the want of every other Christian virtue.

This is a most fatal delusion; and yet in the present times a very common one. Benevolence is the favourite, the fashionable virtue of the age; it is universally cried up by infidels and libertines as the first and only duty of man; and even many who pretend to the name of Christians, are too apt to rest upon it as the most essential part of their religion, and the chief basis of their title to the rewards of the gospel. But that gospel, as we have just seen, prescribes to us several other duties, which require from us the same attention as those we owe to our neighbour; and if we fail in any of them, we can have no hope of sharing in the benefits procured for us by the sacrifice of our Redeemer. What then God and nature, as well as Christ and his apostles, have joined together, let no man dare to put asunder. Let no one flatter himself with obtaining the rewards, or even escaping the punishments of the gospel, by performing only one branch of his duty; nor let him ever suppose, that under the shelter of benevolence he can either on the one hand evade the first and great command, the love of his Maker; or on the other hand, that he can securely indulge his favourite passions, can compound as it were with God for his sensuality by acts of generosity, and purchase by his wealth a general license to sin. This may be very good pagan morality, may be very good modern philosophy, but it is not Christian godliness.

As it is my purpose to touch only on the most important and most generally useful parts of our Saviour's discourse, I shall pass over what remains

of it, and hasten to the conclusion, which is expressed by the sacred historian in these words: “And it came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine; for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes*.” Both his matter and his manner were infinitely beyond any thing they had ever heard before. He did not, like the heathen philosophers, entertain his hearers with dry metaphysical discourses on the nature of the supreme good, and the several divisions and subdivisions of virtue; nor did he, like the Jewish rabbies, content himself with dealing out ceremonies and traditions, with discoursing on mint and cummin, and estimating the breadth of a phylactery; but he drew off their attention from these trivial and contemptible things, to the greatest and the noblest objects; the existence of one supreme Almighty Being, the Creator, Preserver, and Governor of the universe; the first formation of man; his fall from original innocence; the consequent corruption and depravity of his nature; the remedy provided for him by the goodness of our Maker and the death of our Redeemer; the nature of that divine religion which he himself came to reveal to mankind; the purity of heart and sanctity of life which he required; the communications of God’s holy spirit to assist our own feeble endeavours here, and a crown of immortal glory to recompense us hereafter.

The morality he taught was the purest, the soundest, the sublimest, the most perfect, that had ever before entered into the imagination or proceeded from the lips of man. And this he delivered in a manner the most striking and impressive; in short, sententious,

* Matt. vii. 28, 29.

solemn, important, ponderous rules and maxims, or in familiar, natural, affecting similitudes and parables. He showed also a most consummate knowledge of the human heart, and dragged to light all its artifices, subtleties, and evasions. He discovered every thought as it arose in the mind; he detected every irregular desire before it ripened into action. He manifested at the same time the most perfect impartiality. He had no respect of persons. He reproved vice in every station, wherever he found it, with the same freedom and boldness; and he added to the whole the weight, the irresistible weight, of his own example. He, and he only, of all the sons of men, acted up in every the minutest instance to what he taught; and his life exhibited a perfect portrait of his religion. But what completed the whole was, that he taught, as the evangelist expresses it, *with authority*, with the authority of a divine teacher. The ancient philosophers could do nothing more than give good advice to their followers; they had no means of enforcing that advice; but our great Lawgiver's precepts are all DIVINE COMMANDS. He spoke in the name of God: he called himself the Son of God. He spoke in a tone of superiority and authority, which no one before had the courage or the right to assume: and finally, he enforced every thing he taught by the most solemn and awful sanctions, by a promise of eternal felicity to those who obeyed him, and a denunciation of the most tremendous punishment to those who rejected him.

These were the circumstances which gave our blessed Lord the authority with which he spake. No wonder then that the people "were astonished at his doctrines; and that they all declared he spake as never man spake*."

* John vii. 46.

LECTURE VIII.

MATTHEW VIII.

THE eighth chapter of St. Matthew, a part of which will be the subject of this Lecture, begins with the miraculous cure of the leper; which is related in the following manner:

“ When our Lord was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him, and behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth his hand and touched him, saying, *I will*; be thou clean: and immediately his leprosy was cleansed. And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go thy way, show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.”

The leprosy is a disorder of the most malignant and disgusting nature. It was once common in Europe. Those infected with it were called Lazars, who were separated from all human society, (the disease being highly contagious) and were confined in hospitals called Lazarettos, of which it is said there were no less than nine thousand at one time in Europe. For the last two hundred years this distemper has

almost entirely vanished from this and other countries of Europe, and an instance of it now is but seldom to be met with. In the East it still exists to a certain degree; and there in former ages it had its source and origin, and raged for a great length of time with extraordinary violence.

In the law of Moses there are very particular directions given concerning the treatment of lepers, and a ceremonial appointed for the examination of them by the priest when they were supposed to be cured. But no *natural* remedy is prescribed by Moses for the cure of it. It was considered by the Jews as a disease sent by God, and to be cured only by his interposition. There could not therefore be a stronger proof of our Saviour's divine power, than his curing this most loathsome disease, of which many instances besides this occur in the gospels. The manner too in which he performed this cure was equally an evidence that all the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in him*; it was instantaneous, with a touch, and a few words, and those words the most sublime and dignified that can be imagined: I WILL; BE THOU CLEAN; and immediately the leprosy departed from him. This was plainly the language as well as the act of a God. I WILL; BE THOU CLEAN.

Yet with all this supernatural power there was no ostentation or parade, no arrogant contempt of ancient ceremonies and institutions, (which an enthusiast always tramples under foot); but, on the contrary, a perfect submission to the established laws and usages of his country. He said to the man who was healed, "See thou tell no man; but go thy way, show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses

* Coloss. ii, 9.

commanded, for a testimony unto them.” Here he gave at once a striking example both of humility and obedience. He enjoined the man to keep secret the astonishing miracle he had wrought, and he commanded him to comply with the injunctions of Moses; to show himself to the priest, to undergo the examination, and to offer the sacrifice prescribed by the law*; which, at the same time that it showed his disposition to fulfil all righteousness, established the truth of the miracle beyond all controversy, by making the priest himself the judge of the reality of the cure. This was not the mode which an impostor would have chosen.

After this miracle, the next incident that occurs, is the remarkable and interesting story of the centurion, whose servant was cured of the palsy by our Saviour. The relation of this miracle is as follows: “When Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him and saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented†. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under

* Lev. xiv.

† In the parallel passage of St. Luke, chap. vii. it is said, that the centurion sent messengers to Jesus; but no mention is made of his coming to him in person. This difficulty may be cleared up by observing, that in scripture what any person does by his messengers he is frequently represented as doing by himself. Thus Christ, who preached to the Ephesians by his apostles, is said to have preached to them himself, Eph. ii. 17. But it seems to me not at all improbable, that the centurion may both have sent messengers to Jesus, and afterwards gone to him in person. “Not thinking himself worthy” (as he himself expresses it) to go to Christ in the first instance, he sent probably the elders of the Jews, and then some of his friends, to implore our Lord to heal his servant, not meaning to give him the trouble of coming to his house. But when he found that Jesus was actually on his way to him, what was more natural for him than to hasten out of his house to meet him, and to make his acknowledgments to him in person?

my roof; but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me; and I say unto this man, go, and he goeth; and to another, come, and he cometh; and to a third, do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed him, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And Jesus said unto the centurion, go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee; and his servant was healed in the self-same hour."

This is the short and edifying history of the Roman centurion; and the reason of its being recorded by the sacred writers was, in the first place, to give a most striking evidence of our Saviour's divine power, which enabled him to restore the centurion's servant to health *at a distance*, and without so much as seeing him; and, in the next place, to set before us, in the character of the centurion, an illustrious example of those eminent Christian virtues, humanity and charity, piety and generosity, humility and faith.

Of the former of these virtues, humanity and charity, he gave a very convincing proof in the solicitude he showed for the welfare of his servant, and the strong interest he took in the recovery of his health. And this is the more remarkable and the more honourable to the centurion, because in general the treatment which the servants of the Romans experienced from their masters was very different indeed from what we see in the present instance. These servants were almost all of them slaves, and were too commonly treated with extreme rigour and cruelty. They were often strained to labour beyond their strength, were confined to loathsome dungeons, were loaded with chains, were

scourged and tortured without reason, were deserted in sickness and old age, and put to death for trivial faults and slight suspicions, and sometimes out of mere wantonness and cruelty, without any reason at all. Such barbarity as this, which was at that time by no means uncommon, which indeed has in a greater or less degree universally prevailed in every country where slavery has been established, and which shows in the strongest light the danger of trusting absolute power of any kind, political or personal, in the hands of such a creature as man; this barbarity, I say, forms a most striking contrast to the kindness and compassion of the centurion, who, though he had so much power over his slaves, and so many instances of its severest exertion before his eyes, yet made use of it, as we here see, not for their oppression and destruction, but their happiness, comfort, and preservation.

The next virtues which attract our notice in the centurion's character are his piety and generosity. These were eminently displayed in the affection he manifested towards the Jewish people, and his building them a place of worship at his own expense; for the elders of the Jews informed Jesus, "that he loved their nation, and had built them a synagogue*."

The Jews, it is well known, were at this time under the dominion of the Romans. Their country was a Roman province, where this centurion had a military command; and they who are acquainted with the Roman history know well with what cruelty, rapacity, and oppression, the governors and commanding officers in the conquered provinces too commonly behaved towards the people whom they were sent to keep in awe. So far were they from building them

* Luke vii. 5.

temples or synagogues, that they frequently invaded even those sacred retreats, and laid their sacrilegious hands on every thing that was valuable in them. Of this we have abundant proofs in the history of Verres, when governor of Sicily; and Verres was in many respects a faithful representative of too large a part of the Roman governors. In the midst of this brutality and insolence of power does this gallant soldier stand up to patronize and assist a distressed and an injured people; and it is a testimony as glorious to his memory as it is singular and almost unexampled in his circumstances, that he *loved the Jewish nation*, and that he gave a very decisive and magnificent proof of it, by building them a synagogue; for there cannot be a stronger indication both of love to mankind and love towards God, than erecting places of worship where they are wanted*. Without buildings to assemble in, there can be no public worship; without public worship, there can be no religion: and what kind of

* There is a most dreadful want of this nature in the western part of this great metropolis. From St. Martin's-in-the-Fields to Marylebone church inclusive, a space containing perhaps 200,000 souls, there are only five parish churches, St. Martin's, St. Anne's Soho, St. James's, St. George's Hanover Square, and the very small church at Marylebone. There are, it is true, a few chapels interspersed in this place; but what they can contain is a mere trifle, compared to the whole number of inhabitants in those parts, and the lowest classes are almost entirely excluded from them. The only measure that can be of any essential service, is the erection of several spacious parish churches, capable of receiving very large congregations, and affording decent accommodations for the lower and inferior, as well as the higher orders of the people. In the reign of Queen Anne, a considerable sum of money was voted by Parliament for fifty new churches. It is most devoutly to be wished, that the present parliament would, to a certain extent at least, follow so honourable an example. It is, I am sure, in every point of view, political, moral, and religious, well worthy the attention of the British legislature. A sufficient number of new parish churches erected both in the capital and in other parts of the kingdom where they are wanted, for the use of the members of the church of England of all conditions, would very essentially conduce to the interests of religion, and the security and welfare of the established church.

creatures men become without religion; into what excesses of barbarity, ferocity, impiety, and every species of profligacy, they quickly plunge, we have too plainly seen: God grant that we may never feel!

The next remarkable feature in the character of the centurion is his humility. How completely this most amiable of human virtues had taken possession of his soul, is evident from the *manner* in which he solicited our Saviour for the cure of his servant; how cautious, how modest, how diffident, how timid, how fearful of offending, even whilst he was only begging an act of kindness for another! Twice did he send messengers to our Lord, as thinking himself unworthy to address him in his own person; and when at our Saviour's approach to his house he himself came out to meet him, it was only to entreat him not to trouble himself any further; for that he was not worthy that Jesus should enter under his roof.

This lowliness of mind in the centurion is the more remarkable, because *humility*, in the gospel sense of the word, is a virtue with which the ancients, and more particularly the Romans, were totally unacquainted. They had not even a word in their language to describe it by. The only word that seems to express it, *humilitas*, signifies baseness, servility, and meanness of spirit, a thing very different from true Christian humility; and indeed this was the only idea they entertained of that virtue. Every thing that we call meek and humble, they considered as mean and contemptible. A haughty, imperious, overbearing temper, a high opinion of their own virtue and wisdom, a contempt of all other nations but their own, a quick sense and a keen resentment, not only of injuries, but even of the slightest affronts, this was the favourite

and predominant character among the Romans; and that gentleness of disposition, that low estimation of our own merits, that ready preference of others to ourselves, that fearfulness of giving offence, that abasement of ourselves in the sight of God which *we* call *humility*, they considered as the mark of a tame, abject, and unmanly mind. When therefore we see this virtuous centurion differing so widely from his countrymen in this respect, we may certainly conclude that his notions of morality were of a much higher standard than theirs, and that his disposition peculiarly fitted him for the reception of the gospel. For humility is that virtue, which, more than any other, disposes the mind to yield to the evidences, and embrace the doctrines, of the Christian revelation. It is that virtue which the gospel was peculiarly meant to produce, on which it lays the greatest stress, and in which perhaps more than any other, consists the true essence and vital principle of the Christian temper. We therefore find the strongest exhortations to it in almost every page of the gospel: “I say to every man that is among you,” says St. Paul, “not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think, but to think soberly. Mind not high things: be not wise in your own conceits, but condescend to men of low estate. Stretch not yourselves beyond your measure. Blessed are the poor in spirit, says our Lord, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever shall humble himself as a little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect to the lowly. As for the proud he beholdeth them afar off. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up. God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble. Learn of me, says our

Saviour, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls*.”

I come now, lastly, to consider that remarkable part of the centurion's character more particularly noticed by our Lord, I mean his FAITH. “I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.” Now the reason of the high encomiums bestowed on him by our Saviour on this account was, because he reasoned himself into a belief of our Lord's power to work miracles, even at a distance; because he who had been bred up in the principles of heathenism, and whose only guide was the light of nature, did notwithstanding frankly submit himself to sufficient evidence, and was induced, by the accounts he had received of our Saviour's doctrines and miracles, to acknowledge that he was a divine person. Whereas the Jews, to whom he was first and principally sent, who from their infancy were instructed in the holy scriptures, in which were such plain and express promises of the Messiah, and who actually did expect his coming about that time, suffered themselves to be so blinded by their prejudices and passions, that neither the unspotted sanctity of his life, the excellency of his doctrine, nor the repeated and astonishing miracles which he wrought, could make the slightest impression on the greater part of that stubborn people. Hence we may see how impossible it is for any degree of evidence to convince those who are determined not to be convinced; and what little hopes there are of ever satisfying modern infidels, if they will not be content with the proofs they already have. They are continually complaining for want of evidence; and so were the Jews always calling out

* Rom. xii. 3, 6. 2 Cor. x. 14. Matt. v. 3. xviii. 4. Psalm cxxxviii. 6. James iv. 6, 10. Matt. xi. 29.

for new signs and new wonders, even when miracles were daily wrought before their eyes. We may therefore say of the former what our Saviour said of the latter, “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead*.” It is possible, we find, for incredulity to resist even ocular demonstration; and when obstinacy, vanity, and vice, have got thorough possession of the heart, they will not only subdue reason and enslave the understanding, but even bar up all the senses, and shut out conviction at every inlet to the mind. This was most eminently the case with some of the principal Jews. Because our Saviour’s appearance did not correspond to their erroneous and preconceived idea of the Messiah, because he was not a triumphant prince, a temporal hero and deliverer, but above all, because he upbraided them with their vices, and preached up repentance and reformation, every testimony that he could give of his divine authority and power was rejected with scorn. In vain did he feed thousands with a handful of provisions; in vain did he send away diseases with a word; in vain did he make the graves give back their dead, rebuke the winds and waves, and evil spirits still more unruly and obstinate than they. In answer to all this they could say, “Is not this the carpenter’s son? Does he not eat and drink with publicans and sinners, and with unwashen hands? Does he not even break the sabbath, by commanding sick men to carry their beds on that sacred day†?” These, doubtless, were unanswerable arguments against miracles, signs, and prophecies, against the evidence of sense itself, against the universal voice of nature, bearing testimony to Christ.

* Luke xvi. 31.

† Matt. ix. 11. xiii. 55. Luke xi. 38. John v. 18.

The honest centurion, on the contrary, without any Judaical prejudices to distort his understanding, without asking any ill-timed and impertinent questions about the birth or family of Christ, attends only to the facts before him. He had heard of Jesus, had heard of his unblemished life, his heavenly doctrines, his numerous and astonishing miracles, had heard them confirmed by such testimony as no ingenuous mind could resist. He immediately surrenders himself up to such convincing evidence; and so far from requiring (as the Jews continually did, and as modern sceptics still do) more and stronger proofs, he seems afraid of showing the slightest distrust of our Saviour's power. He declares his belief of his being able to perform a miracle at any distance; and entreats him not to give himself the trouble of coming to his house in person, but to speak the word only and his servant should be healed.

This, then, is the disposition of mind we ought more particularly to cultivate; that freedom from self-sufficiency and pride and prejudice of every kind, that simplicity and singleness of heart which is open to conviction, and receives, without resistance, the sacred impressions of truth. It is the want of this, not of evidence, that still makes infidels in Europe as it did at first in Asia. It is this principle operating in different ways, which now imputes to fraud and collusion those miracles which the Jews ascribed to Beelzebub; which now rejects all *human testimony*, as it formerly did even the *perceptions of sense*.

Such were the distinguished virtues of this excellent centurion; the contemplation of whose character suggests to us a variety of important remarks.

The first is, that the miracles of our Lord had the

fullest credit given to them, not only (as is sometimes asserted) by low, obscure, ignorant, and illiterate men, but by men of rank and character, by men of the world, by men perfectly competent to ascertain the truth of any facts presented to their observation, and not likely to be imposed upon by false pretences. Of this description were the centurion here mentioned; the Roman proconsul, Sergius Paulus; Dionysius, a member of the supreme court of Areopagus at Athens; and several others of equal dignity and consequence.

Secondly, the history of the centurion teaches us, that there is no situation of life, no occupation, no profession, however unfavourable it may appear to the cultivation of religion, which precludes the possibility or exempts us from the obligation of acquiring those good dispositions, and exercising those Christian virtues, which the gospel requires. Men of the world are apt to imagine that religion was not made for them; that it was intended only for those who pass their days in obscurity, retirement, and solitude, where they meet with nothing to interrupt their devout contemplations, no allurements to divert their attention, and seduce their affections from heaven and heavenly things. But as to those whose lot is cast in the busy and the tumultuous scenes of life, who are engaged in various occupations and professions, or surrounded with gaieties, with pleasures and temptations, it cannot be expected that, amidst all these impediments, interruptions, and attractions, they can give up much of their time and thoughts to another and a distant world, when they have so many things that press upon them and arrest their attention in this.

These, I am persuaded, are the real sentiments, and they are perfectly conformable to the actual practice,

of a large part of mankind. But to all these pretences, the instance of the centurion is a direct, complete, and satisfactory answer. He was, by his situation in life, a man of the world. His profession was that which of all others is generally considered as most adverse to religious sentiments and habits, most contrary to the peaceful, humane, and gentle spirit of the gospel, and most exposed to the fascination of gaiety, pleasure, thoughtlessness, and dissipation. Yet amidst all these obstructions to purity of heart, to mildness of disposition and sanctity of manners, we see this illustrious CENTURION rising above all the disadvantages of his situation, and, instead of sinking into vice and irreligion, becoming a model of piety and humility, and of all those virtues which necessarily spring from such principles. This is an unanswerable proof, that whenever men abandon themselves to impiety, infidelity, and profligacy, the fault is not in the situation, but in the heart; and that there is no mode of life, no employment or profession, which may not, if we please, be made consistent with a sincere belief in the gospel, and with the practice of every duty we owe to our Maker, our Redeemer, our fellow-creatures, and ourselves.

Nor is this the only instance in point: for it is extremely remarkable, and well worthy our attention, that among all the various characters we meet with in the New Testament, there are few represented in a more amiable light, or spoken of in stronger terms of approbation, than those of certain military men. Beside the centurion, who is the subject of this Lecture, it was a centurion who, at our Saviour's crucifixion, gave that voluntary, honest, and unprejudiced testimony in his favour, "*Truly this was the Son of God**." It was a

* Matt. xxvii. 54.

centurion who generously preserved the life of St. Paul, when a proposition was made to destroy him after his shipwreck on the island of Melita*. It was a centurion to whom St. Peter was sent by the express appointment of God, to make him the first convert among the gentiles; a distinction of which he seemed, in every respect, worthy: being, as we are told, “a just and a devout man, one that feared God with all his house, that gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always †.”

We see then that our centurion was not the only military man celebrated in the gospel for his piety and virtue; nor are there wanting, thank God, distinguished instances of the same kind in our own age, in our own nation, among our own commanders, and in the recent memory of every one here present. All which examples tend to confirm the observation already made, of the perfect consistency of a military, and every other mode of life, with a firm belief in the doctrines and a conscientious obedience to the precepts of religion.

Thirdly, there is still another reflection arising from this circumstance, with which I shall conclude the present Lecture; and this is, that when we observe men bred up in arms repeatedly spoken of in scripture in such strong terms of commendation as those we have mentioned, we are authorized to conclude, that the profession they are engaged in is not, as a mistaken sect of Christians amongst us professes to think, an unlawful one. On the contrary, it seems to be studiously placed by the sacred writers in a favourable and an honourable light; and in this light it always has been and always ought to be considered. He who undertakes an occupation of great toil and great danger, for the purpose

* Acts xxvii. 43.

† Acts x. 2.

of serving, defending, and protecting his country, is a most valuable and respectable member of society; and if he conducts himself with valour, fidelity, and humanity, and amidst the horrors of war cultivates the gentle manners of peace, and the virtues of a devout and holy life, he most amply deserves, and will assuredly receive, the esteem, the admiration, and the applause of his grateful country, and, what is of still greater importance, the approbation of his God.

LECTURE IX.

MATTHEW X.

I NOW proceed to the consideration of the 10th chapter of St. Matthew.

In the preceding chapter we find our Saviour working a great variety of miracles. He healed the man that was sick of the palsy, and forgave his sins; a plain proof of his divinity, because none but God has the power and the prerogative of forgiving sins; and therefore the Jews accused him of blasphemy for *pretending* to this power. He also cured the woman who touched the hem of his garment. He raised to life the deceased daughter of the ruler of the synagogue. He restored to-sight the two blind men that followed him; and he cast out from a dumb man the devil with which he was possessed, and restored him to his speech. These miracles are particularly recorded: but beside these, there must have been a prodigious number wrought by him, of which no distinct mention is made; for we are informed in the 35th verse that he went about *all* the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing *every* sickness and *every* disease among the people.

These continued miracles must necessarily have produced a great number of converts. And accordingly

we find, the multitude of his followers was now so great, that he found it necessary to appoint some co-adjutors to himself in this great work. “The harvest truly is plenteous, says he to his disciples, but the labourers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest*.”

These labourers he now determined to send forth; and in pursuance of this resolution, we find him in the beginning of this chapter, calling together his disciples, out of whom he selected twelve, called by St. Matthew apostles, or messengers; whom he sent forth to preach the gospel, and furnished them with ample powers for that purpose; powers such as nothing less than Omnipotence could bestow. The names of these apostles were as follow: Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, another James, Thaddeus or Jude, Simon, Judas Iscariot. These twelve persons, St. Matthew tells us, Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, “go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any cities of the Samaritans enter ye not; but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel; and as ye go, preach, saying, the kingdom of heaven is at hand †.” This was the business which they were sent to accomplish; they were to go about the country of Judæa, and to preach to the Jews in the first place the holy religion which their divine Master had just began to teach. Then follow their *powers*; “heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils.”

After this come their instructions, and a variety of directions how to conduct themselves in the discharge of their arduous and important mission, of which I shall take notice hereafter; but must first offer to your

* Matt. ix. 37, 38.

† Matt. x. 2, 3.

consideration, a few remarks on this extraordinary designation of the apostles to their important office.

And, in the first place, who were the men singled out by our blessed Lord for the purpose of diffusing his religion through the world; that is, for the very singular purpose of persuading men to relinquish the religion of their ancestors, the principles they had imbibed from their infancy, the customs, the prejudices, the habits, the ways of thinking, which they had for a long course of years indulged, and to adopt in their room a system of thinking and acting in many respects directly opposite to them; a religion exposing them to many present hardships and severe trials, and referring them for their reward to a distant period of time, and an invisible world? Was it to be expected that such a change as this, such a sudden and violent revolution in the minds of men, could be brought about by common and ordinary instruments? Would it not require agents of a very superior order, of considerable influence from their birth and wealth and situation in life, men of the profoundest erudition, of the brightest talents, of the most consummate knowledge of the world and the human heart, of the most insinuating manners, of the most commanding and fascinating eloquence? Were then the apostles of this description? Quite the contrary. They were plain, humble, unpretending men, of low birth and low occupations, without learning, without education, without any extraordinary endowments natural or acquired, without any thing, in short, to recommend them but their simplicity, integrity, and purity of manners. With what hopes of success could men such as these set about the most difficult of all enterprises, the reformation of a corrupt

world, and the conversion of it to a new faith? Yet we all know that they actually did accomplish these two most arduous things, and that on the foundations they laid, the whole superstructure of the Christian church has been raised, and the divine truths of the gospel spread through all parts of the civilized world. How, then, is this to be accounted for? It is utterly impossible to account for it in any way but that which Christ himself points out, in this very charge to his apostles: "Heal the sick," says he to them in the 8th verse, "cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils." Here is the explanation of the whole mystery. It was the powers with which they were invested, the miracles they were enabled to perform, which procured such multitudes of converts. The people saw that God was with them, and that therefore every thing they taught must be true.

Here is at once a sufficient cause assigned for the effect produced by agents, apparently so unequal to the production of it. We challenge all the infidels in the world to assign any other adequate cause. They have never yet done it; and we assert with confidence that they never can.

These, then, were the powers the apostles carried along with them; and where shall we find the sovereign that could ever furnish his ambassadors with such qualifications as these? If they were asked with what authority they were invested, and what proofs they could give that they were actually commissioned to instruct mankind in the principles of true religion, by that great personage the Son of God, whose servants and ministers they pretended to be, their answer was short and decisive; bring us your sick, and we will heal them; show us your lepers, and we will cleanse them;

produce your dead, and we will restore them to life. It would not be very easy to dispute the authenticity of such credentials as these.

It is further to be observed on this head, that the circumstance of our Saviour not only working miracles himself, but also enabling others to perform them, is an instance of divine power, to which no other prophet or teacher before him, true or false, ever pretended. In this, as in many other respects, he stands unrivalled and alone.

After this follow some directions, no less singular and new. “Provide neither gold nor silver, nor brass in your purses; nor scrip for your journey; neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves*.”

That is, they were to take a long journey, without making any other provision for it than the staff in their hand, and the clothes they had on; for, says Jesus, the workman is worthy of his meat; an intimation that the providence of God would watch over and supply their wants. This required some confidence in their Master; and unless they had good grounds for thinking that it was in his power to engage Providence on their side (or, in other words, that he was actually the Son of God) they would scarce have run the risk of so unpromising an expedition. But this conclusion grows infinitely stronger, when we come to the declaration in the next and following verses: “Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves; be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men; for they will deliver you up to the councils; and they will scourge you in the synagogues; and ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my name’s sake, for a testimony against them and the

* Matt. x. 9, 10.

Gentiles; and the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child; and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death; and ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake*."

What now shall we say to this extraordinary and unexampled declaration?

When a sovereign sends his ambassadors to a foreign country, he makes an ample provision for their journey, he assigns them a liberal allowance for their support, and generally holds out at the same time the prospect of a future reward for their labours and their services to their country on their return from their embassy. And without this, few men would be disposed to undertake the commission.

But here every thing is the reverse: instead of support, they were to meet with persecution; instead of an honourable reception, they were to experience universal hatred and detestation; instead of reward, they were to be exposed to certain ruin and destruction, and to be let loose like so many sheep among wolves.

Can we now conceive it possible, that any men in their senses should, without some very powerful and extraordinary motive, voluntarily undertake such a commission as this, in which their only recompense was to be affliction, misery, pain, and death; in which, all the natural affections of the human heart were to be extinguished or inverted, and their nearest relations, their parents, children, or brethren, were to be their persecutors and executioners? Is it usual for human beings wantonly and needlessly to expose themselves to such evils as these, without the least prospect of any advantage to themselves or their fami-

* Matt. x. 16, 17, 18. 21, 22.

lies? You may say perhaps that simple, ignorant, uneducated men, like the apostles, might easily be deluded by an artful leader, and betrayed into very dreadful calamities, and that we see multitudes thus deceived and ruined every day. It is true; but where in this case is the *art* of the leader, or the *delusion* of the followers? In the cases alluded to, men are induced to embark in perilous undertakings, and to run headlong into destruction, by fair promises and tempting offers, by promises of liberty, of wealth, of honour, of popularity, of glory. But here, instead of employing any art, or making any attempt to *deceive* his followers, our Saviour plainly tells them they are to expect nothing but what is most dreadful to human nature. Whatever they suffered therefore they suffered with their eyes open, and with their own free choice and consent. It is true they were plain, ignorant men; but they could feel pain, and they could have no more fondness for misery and death than other people. Yet this they did actually and cheerfully undergo at the command of their Lord. How is this to be explained and accounted for? Is there any instance upon record before this in the annals of the world, where twelve grave, sober men, without any reason, and without being misled by any artifice or delusion whatever, voluntarily exposed themselves at the desire of another person to persecution, torment, and destruction! There must have been some most cogent reason for such a conduct as this; and that reason could be nothing less than a full and perfect conviction, arising from the miracles which they saw with their own eyes, and which they themselves were enabled to perform, that Christ was what he pre-

tended to be, the Son of God; that all power was given to him in heaven and on earth; and that he was able to fulfil the promises he had made them of a recompense in a future life, infinitely surpassing in magnitude and in duration all the sufferings they could experience in the present world.

This is the only rational account to be given of their conduct, and it presents to us, in a short compass, a strong convincing evidence of the truth of the Christian revelation.

In order to fortify the minds of his disciples against the severe trials they were to undergo, our blessed Lord, in the 28th verse, adds the following exhortation: "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

This passage contains a decisive proof of two very important doctrines, the existence of a soul distinct from the body, and the continuance of that soul after death (both of which, in direct opposition to this and many other passages of scripture, some late writers have dared to controvert); and it plainly refers the apostles to the consideration of a future life, in which all their views, their hopes, and fears, were to centre, and by which their conduct in this world was entirely to be regulated. The worst their enemies could do to them in this life was to kill the body, which must some time or other be destroyed by age or disease. But God was able to kill the soul, which was formed for immortality, to annihilate it at once, or to condemn it to everlasting punishment. It was, therefore, of infinitely more consequence to avoid his displeasure, and to secure his approbation by performing their

duty, than, by shamefully deserting it, to escape the infliction of the bitterest evils that their fellow creatures could bring upon them.

In conformity to this advice, he tells them, “that he that endureth to the end shall be saved; and that he who loses his life for his sake in this world, shall find it, in a far more exalted sense, in the next*.”

This was solid comfort and substantial support. But unless our Lord had given them irresistible miraculous evidence of the reality of this future reward, unless they had absolute demonstration of its certainty, it was utterly impossible that they could be so mad as to sacrifice to this expectation every thing most valuable in this life, and even life itself.

As a still further support under the terrifying prospect which our blessed Lord had held up to the apostles, he assures them that the providence of God would continually superintend and watch over them.

“Are not two sparrows,” says he, “sold for a farthing, and one of them shall not fall to the ground without your Father; but the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not, therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows †.”

Here we have that most important and comfortable doctrine of a particular Providence plainly and clearly laid down.

That He who erected the immense and magnificent fabric of the universe will continue to regard and to preserve the work of his own hands, and maintain what is called the general order of nature, and the ordinary course of human affairs, is so consonant to reason and common sense, that few even of the pagans who believed the being of a God, entertained any doubt of

* Matt. x. 22, 30.

† Matt. x. 29, 30, 31.

this *general* superintendence of the Deity over the worlds he has created, and the inhabitants he has placed in them. But when we descend from this comprehensive view of things to the several constituent parts of the general system, and to every individual of every species of animated beings dispersed throughout the whole; when we reflect how very inconsiderable a place this globe that we inhabit holds amongst the celestial bodies, how very small a portion it occupies of unbounded space, and how infinitely minute and insignificant every human creature must appear in the vast mass of created beings; we can hardly think it possible that the care of the Supreme Being should extend to ourselves; we cannot help fearing that we shall be lost and overlooked in the immensity of creation, and that we are objects far too small and minute to fall within the sphere of our Maker's observation. The more we reason on this subject, the more ground we shall find for these apprehensions; and there is nothing, I will venture to say, in the whole compass of what is called natural religion or modern philosophy, that can in the smallest degree tend to allay or to remove these natural, these unavoidable misgivings of the human mind.

Here then is one of those many instances in which we can have no certainty, no solid ground for the sole of our foot to stand upon, but in the gospel of Christ. Our reason, though sent out ever so often in search of a resting-place, returns to us, like Noah's dove, when the waters covered the earth, without any token of comfort. It is scripture only which in this important point can give rest unto our souls. There we are assured that every individual being, even the least and most contemptible, even the sparrow that is sold for

less than a farthing, is under the eye of the Almighty; that, so far from man being too inconsiderable for the notice of his Maker, the minutest parts of his body, the very hairs of his head, are all numbered. These very strong instances are plainly chosen on purpose to quiet all our fears, and to banish from our minds every idea of our being too small and insignificant for the care and protection of the Almighty.

This most consolatory doctrine of a particular providence, of a providence which watches over every individual of the human race, places the Christian in a situation totally different from that of every one who disbelieves revelation. The latter must conceive himself under no other government but that of chance or fortune, and of course must consider the whole happiness of his life as exposed every moment to the mercy of the next accident that may befall him. The true believer, on the contrary, has the most perfect conviction that he is constantly under the protection of an almighty and merciful God, in whom he lives, and moves, and has his being; “whose eyes are over the righteous, and whose ears are open to their prayers;” that therefore if he lives, so as to merit the approbation of his heavenly Father, he has every reason to hope for such a degree of happiness, even here, as the imperfection of human nature will admit; and he is certain that nothing *dreadful* can befall him without the knowledge and permission of his great protector, who will even in that case support him under it, and render it ultimately conducive to his good.

The next passage in this chapter to which I shall direct your attention, is that very remarkable one which has furnished the enemies of Christianity with so much pretence for obloquy and invective against

the gospel, and has been the source of no small uneasiness and dismay to some of its warmest friends. The passage I mean is this; “Think not” (says our Lord) “I am come to send peace on earth, I came not to send peace but a sword; for I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and a man’s foes shall be those of his own household*.”

What shall we say now, (exclaims the infidel) to this extraordinary declaration? Here we have the Author of the Christian religion himself openly and explicitly avowing that he came to send a sword upon earth, to dissolve all the tender endearing ties of domestic affection: to set the nearest relations at variance, and to arm them with inextinguishable rage and rancour against each other.

But can this be really the sense of our Saviour’s words? Can HE mean to denounce war and destruction to the human species? HE, whose whole religion breathes nothing but peace, gentleness, kindness, and compassion to every human being; who made charity, or the love of man, the great characteristic mark of his religion; who expressly forbade his disciples “to call down fire from heaven” on those who had insulted them; who in this very chapter commanded them “to be harmless as doves; and declared that he came not to destroy men’s lives, but to save them†?” It is evidently impossible that the author of such precepts and such professions could mean literally to spread ruin and desolation over the earth. What then was his meaning? It was to obviate an error into which the apostles would be very apt to fall, and which

* Matt. x. 34, 35, 36.

† Matt. x. 16. Luke, ix. 56.

probably our Saviour saw rising in their minds. You tell us (they perhaps said within themselves,) you tell us that we shall be persecuted, tormented, and put to death, and that even by those who are most nearly connected with us. But how is this possible? How can all this happen under your protection, under the reign of the Messiah, THE PRINCE OF PEACE, under whom we have always been given to expect tranquillity, repose, and happiness? To this supposed reasoning our Saviour answers: You are mistaken in your idea of that peace, which I, your Messiah, am to give you. It is not immediate temporal peace, but peace in a spiritual sense, peace in your own minds, and peace with God. Ultimately indeed I shall establish peace in *every* sense of the word, and “shall make wars to cease in all the world* ;” but at present, and indeed for many years to come, I shall not bring peace but a sword upon earth. The promulgation of my religion will be productive of much dissension, cruelty, and persecution, not only to you, but to all those who for many ages afterwards shall preach the gospel in purity and truth. The true *cause* of this will be the wickedness and the ferocious passions of men; but the occasion and the *pretence* for it will be the holy religion which you are to promulgate. In this sense, and in this only, it is that I may be said to bring a sword upon earth; but they who *really* bring it, are the open enemies or pretended friends of the gospel.

Still it is said by the adversaries of our faith, that however these words may be interpreted, the fact is, that Christians themselves have brought a sword, and a most destructive sword, upon earth: that they have

* Psalm xlvi. 9.

persecuted one another with inconceivable rancour and fury; and that their dissensions have produced more bloodshed, misery, and desolation, among mankind, than all the other wars of contending nations put together.

To this I answer, in the first place, that the charge as here stated is not true. It is not true that wars of religion have been more frequent and more sanguinary than any others. On the contrary, it may be proved in the clearest manner, from the most authentic facts, that by far the greatest number of wars, as well as the longest, most extensive, and most destructive, have been owing to causes purely political, and those too sometimes of the most trivial nature. And if we can allow men to harass and destroy one another for a mere point of honour, or a few acres of land, why should we think it strange to see them defending, with the same heat and bitterness, what they conceive to be the most essential requisite to happiness both here and hereafter?

2dly, I must observe, that a very large part of those animosities, wars, and massacres, which have been usually styled *religious*, and with the entire guilt of which Christianity has been very unjustly loaded, have been altogether, or at least in a great measure, owing to causes of a very different nature; to the ambition, the resentment, the avarice, the rapacity of princes and of conquerors, who assumed the mask of religion to veil their real purposes, and who pretended to fight in the cause of God and his church, when they had in reality nothing else in view than to advance their power or extend their dominions. All history is full of instances of this kind.

3dly, It should be remembered, that the wildest

excesses of religious persecution did not take place till the world was overrun with barbarity, ignorance, bigotry, and superstition; till military ideas predominated in every thing, in the form of government, in the temper of the laws, in the tenure of lands, in the administration of justice itself; and till the scriptures were shut up in a foreign tongue, and were therefore unknown to the people. It was not therefore from the gospel, but from a total *ignorance* of the gospel, from a total perversion of its true temper, genius, and spirit, that these excesses and enormities arose.

4thly, That this is the real truth of the case, appears demonstrably from this circumstance, that when after the Reformation the scriptures were translated into the several vernacular languages of Europe, and the real nature of the Christian Revelation became of course more generally known, the violence of persecution began to abate; and as the sacred writings were more and more studied, and their true sense better understood, the baneful spirit of intolerance lost ground every day, and the divine principle of Christian charity and benevolence has been continually gaining fresh strength; till at length, at the present moment, persecution by Christians on the score of religion only, has almost entirely vanished from the face of the earth; and we may venture to indulge the hope, that wars of religion, strictly so called, will be heard of no more.

I now proceed to explain the verses immediately following that which we have been just considering.

“ I am come, (says our Lord,) to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her

mother-in-law, and a man's foes shall be those of his own household."

This passage is a clear proof that the calamities and miseries predicted in the preceding verse relate primarily and principally to the apostles themselves, because these words are almost a repetition of what our Lord applied to *them* in the 27th verse, "The brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child; and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death*."

Now as these cruelties were inflicted on the apostles, not by believers, but by unbelieving Jews and heathens, that is, by the enemies of the gospel, it is evident, that when our Saviour says he came to set a man at variance against his father, and so on, he meant only to say, that the religion which he taught would meet with the most violent opposition from the world, and would expose his apostles and disciples to the most unjust and inhuman treatment, even sometimes from their nearest relations.

Our Lord then goes on to say, "He that loveth father and mother more than me, is not worthy of me †." This has an evident reference to the two preceding verses; in which our Lord had declared, that amidst the various miseries that would be occasioned by the wickedness and barbarity of those who rejected and resisted the Christian religion, dissensions would arise even among those most nearly connected with each other, and the true Christian would sometimes find his bitterest enemies even in the bosom of his own family. A father would perhaps persecute his own son, and a mother her daughter, on account of her religious

* Matt. x. 21.

† Matt. x. 37.

opinions, and would by argument and by influence endeavour to persuade, or by authority and power to compel them to abjure their faith. In cases such as these our Lord here intimates, that when the choice is between renouncing our nearest relations and renouncing our religion, we must not hesitate a moment what part we are to take; we must, to obey God rather than man, we must give up all, and follow Christ. “He that loveth father and mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son and daughter more than me, is not worthy of me*.” That is, evidently, when the nearest and dearest relations come in competition with our belief in Christ, and obedience to his commands, our affection for them and deference to their opinions must give place to love for our Redeemer and attachment to our Maker.

In the parallel place of St. Luke this precept is expressed in still stronger terms: “If any man come to me, and *hate* not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple †.”

The mind of the reader is at the first view apt to revolt at the seeming harshness of this declaration; but it is evidently nothing more than a bolder and more figurative way (according to a well-known Hebrew idiom) of conveying the very same sentiment that St. Matthew clothes in gentler language. It means nothing more than that we ought to entertain a more ardent affection for our heavenly Father than for our earthly parents; and that his commands must be preferred to theirs whenever they happen to interfere. And in the same manner several other apparently severe injunctions in the gospel are to be explained and mitigated

* Acts v. 29. Mark x. 28.

† Luke xiv. 26.

by others of the same import, but more perspicuously and more mildly expressed.

But we are not only enjoined to love Christ and his religion more than our nearest relations, where they happen to interfere, but even more than our own life. “He that taketh not his cross and followeth after me, is not worthy of me*.” This plainly alludes to the custom of persons who are going to be crucified bearing their own cross ; and the literal and primary meaning is, that we should be ready, if called upon, to undergo even that painful and ignominious death, rather than renounce our faith. This indeed is a most severe trial ; but it is a trial which it is not only our duty but our interest to undergo, if reduced to the necessity either of forfeiting our life, or renouncing our allegiance to Christ. For we are told here by our Lord himself, that “he who findeth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for his sake shall find it†.” That is, whoever to save his life apostatizes from his faith, shall be punished with the loss of that life which alone deserves the name, life everlasting. But he who sacrifices his life to his religion in this world, shall be rewarded with eternal life in the world to come.

* Matt. x. 38.

† Matt. x. 39.

LECTURE X.



MATTHEW, CHAP. XII.

THE next chapter which seems more peculiarly to deserve our attention, and to require some explanation and illustration, is the 12th chapter of St. Matthew.

It begins thus: “ At that time Jesus went on the sabbath-day through the corn ; and his disciples were an-hungred, and began to pluck the ears of corn and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do on the sabbath-day. But he said unto them, have ye not read what David did when he was an-hungred, and they that were with him ; how he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shew-bread, which it was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests ? Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath-day the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless ? But I say unto you, that in this place is one greater than the temple. But if ye had known what this meaneth, *I will have mercy and not sacrifice*, ye would not have condemned the guiltless ; for the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath-day. And when he was departed thence, he went into the synagogue. And there was a man which had his hand withered ; and they

asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath-day? that they might accuse him. And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath-day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out? How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath-day. Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it forth, and it was restored whole, like as the other."

Although here are two different transactions related, that of plucking the ears of corn, and healing the withered hand, yet as they are closely connected together by the evangelist, and relate to the same subject, the observation of the sabbath, I have recited the whole passage comprehending both these incidents at length, that you might have before you at one view all that our Saviour has said on this important branch of our duty, and that we might fully understand what kind of *rest* it is that our blessed Lord judged to be necessary on the Jewish sabbath, and what limitations and exceptions to it he admitted; from whence we may form some judgement of what our own duty is on that holy day which we justly call **THE LORD'S DAY**, and which must be considered as the Christian sabbath.

From this passage, as well as from many others, it appears, that the Jews had their eyes constantly fixed on Jesus and his followers, and most anxiously sought out for opportunities of fastening some guilt upon them. It appears also that they were extremely unfortunate in these attempts, and compelled (as in the present instance) to have recourse to the silliest and most trivial charges; and even these turned out to be perfectly unfounded. From whence I think we may fairly draw this inference, that the character and conduct of our

Lord and his disciples were perfectly blameless ; since, with all the industry of so many sharp-sighted observers, so extremely well disposed to discover guilt or to make it, they could find no real fault in him.

The pretence on this occasion was, that the disciples, by plucking a few ears of corn, and eating them as they passed through a corn-field on the sabbath-day, had violated the rest of that holy day, and thus transgressed the Mosaical law. But to this our Lord replied, that in cases of extreme necessity the severity of that law might be dispensed with and relaxed. As a proof of this, he appealed first to the example of David, the man after God's own heart, who (as may be seen in 1 Samuel xxi. 6) when he and his men were reduced to great straits for want of food, asked and obtained from Abimelech the priest a part of the consecrated bread which had been taken from the altar, and which it was not lawful for any but the priests to eat. The other instance he adduced was that of the priests themselves, who in the necessary service of the temple on the sabbath day were obliged to work with their own hands, by lighting the fires, killing the victims, offering up the sacrifices, &c. This in any other persons would have been considered as profanations of the sabbath ; but in the priests who were engaged in the duties of religion it was not.

These arguments addressed to a Jew were in themselves unanswerable ; because they appealed to the practice of persons whom the Jews held sacred, and whose conduct they durst not condemn. But they went still further than this ; they went to establish this general principle, that there might be obligations of a force superior even to the law of Moses, and to which it ought in certain cases to give way ; as in the first

instance to the pressing demands of necessity, in the other to the services of the temple.

If then in these cases the law might be dispensed with, still more might it be overruled by a power paramount to every other power, by Him who was far greater and holier than the temple itself, who was *Lord even of the Sabbath*, who was indeed supreme Lord over all, and might therefore authorize his disciples, in a case of real urgency, to depart a little from the rigour of the sabbatical rest.

It should be observed here, that where St. Matthew says, “the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath-day;” St. Mark, in the parallel place, expresses himself thus: “The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath.” That is, the sabbath was given to man for his *benefit*, for the improvement of his soul, as well as for the rest of his body; and the latter, when necessary, must be sacrificed to the former. For man was not made for the sabbath; was not made to be a slave to it, to be so servilely bound down to the strict pharisaical observance of it, as to lose, by that rigorous adherence to the letter, opportunities of doing essential service to himself and his fellow creatures.

To this irresistible force of reasoning, our blessed Lord adds another argument of considerable weight: “If ye had known,” says he, “what this meaneth, *I will have mercy and not sacrifice*, ye would not have condemned the guiltless.” The quotation is from the prophet Hosea; the words are supposed to be those of God himself; and the meaning is, according to a well-known Jewish idiom, *I prefer mercy to sacrifice*: that is, when any ceremonial institution interferes with the execution of any charitable or pious design, the former must give place to the latter; as in the present

instance, a strict observance of the sabbath must not be suffered to deprive my disciples of that refreshment which is necessary to support them under the fatigue of following me, and dispensing to mankind the blessings of the gospel. We see then with what superstitious rigour the Jews adhered to the letter of their law, respecting the Jewish sabbath; and with what superior wisdom and dignity our Lord endeavoured to raise their minds above such trivial things to the true spirit of it, to the life and soul of religion.

The fault however here reproved and corrected, is not one into which we of this country are likely to fall, nor is there any need to warn us against imitating the Jews in this instance. There is no danger that we should carry the observance of *our* sabbath too far, or that we should be too scrupulously nice in avoiding every the minutest infringement of the rest and sanctity of that holy day. The bent and tendency of the present times is too evidently to a contrary extreme, to an excessive relaxation instead of an excessive strictness in the regard shown to the Lord's day. I am not now speaking of the *religious* duties appropriated to the Lord's day, for these are not now before us, but solely of the *rest*, the *repose* which it requires. This rest is plainly infringed, whenever the lower classes of people continue their ordinary occupations on the sabbath, and whenever the higher employ their servants and their cattle on this day in needless labour. This, however, we see too frequently done, more particularly by *selecting* Sunday as a day for travelling, for taking long journies, which might as well be performed at any other time. This is a direct violation of the fourth commandment, which expressly gives the sabbath as a day of rest to our servants and our cattle.

This temporary suspension of labour, this refreshment and relief from incessant toil, is most graciously allowed even to the brute creation, by the great Governor of the universe, whose mercy extends over *all* his works. It is the boon of Heaven itself. It is a small drop of comfort thrown into their cup of misery; and to wrest from them this only privilege, this sweetest consolation of their wretched existence, is a degree of inhumanity for which there wants a name; and of which, few people, I am persuaded, if they could be brought to reflect seriously upon it, would ever be guilty.

These profanations of the sabbath are however sometimes defended on the ground of the very passage we have been just considering. It is alleged, that as our Lord here reproves the Jews for too rigorous an attention to the rest of the sabbath, it conveys an intimation that we ought not to be too exact and scrupulous in that respect; and that many things may in fact be allowable, which timid minds may consider as unlawful. But it should be observed, that Jesus condemns nothing in the conduct of the Jews but what was plainly absurd and superstitious; and he allows of no exceptions to that rest from labour which they observed on the sabbath, except simply works of *necessity* and *charity*; such for instance as those very cases which gave occasion to the conversation in this chapter between Christ and the Jews, that of the disciples plucking the ears of corn on the sabbath-day to satisfy their hunger, and that of our Saviour's restoring the withered hand. It is lawful, in short, as our Saviour expresses it, to *do well* on the sabbath-day; to preserve ourselves, and to benefit our fellow-creatures. Thus far then we may go, but no farther. In other

respects, the *rest* of the Lord's day is to be observed; and those very exceptions which our Saviour makes are a proof, that in every other case he approves and sanctions the duty of resting on the sabbath-day. It is also remarkable, that our own laws, grounding themselves no doubt on this declaration of Christ, make the same exceptions to the rest of the sabbath that he does; they allow works of necessity and charity, but no others*. To these therefore we ought to confine ourselves as nearly as may be; and with these exceptions, and these only, consecrate the sabbath as a *holy rest unto the Lord*.

This rest the Almighty enjoined, not, as is sometimes pretended, to the Jews only, but to all mankind. For even immediately after the great work of creation was finished, we are told, "that God ended his work that he had made, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work which he had made; and God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it; because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made†." It is evident therefore that the seventh day was to be a day of rest *to all mankind*, in memory of God having on that day finished his great work of creation; and this seventh day, after our Lord's resurrection, was changed by his apostles to the *first* day of the week, on which our Lord rose from the dead, and rested from *his* labours; so that the rest of this day is now commemorative of both these important events, the creation and the resurrection.

I now proceed to consider the consequence of this conversation between our Lord and the Pharisees on the subject of the sabbath. One should have expected that so wise and rational an explanation of the law

* See the Statute of 29 C. 2. c. 7.

† Gen. ii. 2, 3.

respecting that day, releasing men from the senseless severities imposed upon them by the servile fears of superstition, but at the same time requiring all that respite from labour which is really conducive to the glory of God and happiness of man; one should have expected, I say, that such wisdom and such benevolence as this would have triumphed over even pharisaical obstinacy, and extorted the admiration and applause of his hearers. But stubborn prejudices, and deep-rooted malignity, are not so easily subdued. For see what actually followed. "The pharisees went out," says the evangelist, "and held a council how they might destroy him." Destroy him! for what? Why, for giving ease to timid minds and scrupulous consciences, and for restoring the withered hand of a poor decrepit man. And were these deeds that deserved destruction? Would it not rather have been the just reward of those inhuman wretches who were capable of conceiving so execrable a project; and would not our Saviour have been justified in calling down fire from heaven, as he easily might, to consume them? But his heart abhorred the thought. He pursued a directly opposite conduct; and instead of inflicting upon them a punishment which might have destroyed them, he chose to set them an example that might amend them. He chose to show them the difference between their temper and his own, between those malignant vindictive passions which governed *them*, and the mild, gentle, conciliating disposition which his religion inspired; between the spirit of the world, in short, and the spirit of the gospel. He withdrew himself silently and quietly from them; and great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all; and, to avoid all irritation and all contest, he charged them that they

should not make him known. "Thus was fulfilled (says the evangelist) that which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, "behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall show judgement to the gentiles. He shall not strive nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgement unto victory*." A most sublime passage! which may thus be paraphrased. Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased! I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall teach true religion, not only to the people of Israel, but to the heathens also; and this he shall do with the utmost tenderness, mildness, and meekness, without contention and noise, without tumult and disturbance. A bruised reed shall he not break; he shall not bear hard upon a wounded and contrite, and truly humble and penitent heart, bowed down with a sense of its infirmities. And smoking flax shall he not quench; the faintest spark of returning virtue he will not extinguish by severity; but will cherish and encourage the one, and will raise and animate and enliven the other; till by these gentle conciliating means he shall have triumphed over the wickedness and malevolence of his enemies, and completely established his religion throughout the world. What an amiable picture is here given us of the divine Author of our faith! and how exactly does this prophetic description correspond to the whole tenour of his conduct in the propagation of his religion.

The next remarkable occurrences which present

* Isaiah xlii. 1--3.

themselves in this chapter are those of our Saviour casting a devil out of a man that was both blind and dumb; the reflections which the Pharisees threw upon him in consequence of this miracle, and the effectual manner in which he silenced them, and repelled their calumny.

The passage is as follows: "Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind and dumb: and he healed him; insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, is not this the son of David? But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, this fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils. And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand. And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?"

This passage affords room for a variety of observation.

In the first place, it is evident from this, as well as from many other passages of holy writ, that at the time when our Saviour promulgated his religion, there was a calamity incident to the human race, of which at present we know nothing, and that is, the possession of their bodies by evil spirits, or devils (as they are usually called in scripture,) which occasioned great torments to the unhappy sufferers, and often deprived them both of their sight and hearing, as in the present instance. Such possessions having long since ceased, they have appeared to several learned men so incredible, that they have been led to deny that they ever existed, and to maintain that they were only diseases of a violent and terrifying nature, attended with

convulsive or epileptic fits ; that this sort of disease was ascribed by the Jews, to the operation of evil spirits ; and that our Saviour, in compliance with their prejudices, treated them as cases of real possession, and pretended to cast out devils, when in fact he only cured the disorder with which the patient was afflicted.

This opinion is supported by great names ; but however great and respectable they may be, it appears to me utterly indefensible.

Every expression that our Lord makes use of with respect to these demoniacs plainly supposes them to be really possessed ; and it is not easy to assign any admissible reason why he should treat them as such if they were not so, and why he should not correct instead of countenancing so gross an error ; as such a conduct could answer no one good purpose, and seems hard to reconcile with his own uniform fairness and sincerity of mind. To have done it to magnify his own power in casting out the evil spirits, would have been, to all appearance, a very needless expedient ; because the immediate removal of a natural disease (if it was one), would have been an equal proof of his divine power. But besides this, there is every where a plain distinction made between common diseases and demoniacal possessions ; which shows that they were totally different things. In the fourth chapter of this gospel, where the very first mention is made of these possessions, it is said that our Lord's fame went throughout all Syria, and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils ; and he healed them. Here you see those that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those possessed with devils, are mentioned as distinct

and separate persons; a plain proof that the demoniacal possessions were not natural diseases: and the very same distinction is made in several other passages of holy writ.

There can be no doubt therefore that the demoniacs were persons really possessed with evil spirits; and although it may seem strange to us, yet we find from Josephus, and other historians, that it was in those times no uncommon case. In fact, it appears that about the time of our Lord's ministry, that tremendous spirit, Satan, or, as he is sometimes called in scripture, the prince of this world, had obtained an extraordinary degree of power over the human race, inflicting upon them the cruellest pains and torments, depriving them of their senses, rendering them wretched in themselves, and terrible to all around them. To subdue this formidable and wicked being, and to destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, was one great object of our Saviour's divine mission; and it seems to have been indispensably necessary for accomplishing the redemption of mankind, that the kingdom of Satan should in the first place be destroyed, and that the sons of men should be rescued from that horrible and disgraceful state of slavery in which he had long held them enthralled. One of the first steps, therefore, that our Lord took before he entered on his ministry, was to establish his superiority over this great enemy of mankind; which he did in that memorable scene of the temptation in the wilderness: and among the earliest of his miracles recorded, is that of casting out devils from those who were possessed by them. And perhaps one reason why these possessions were permitted, might be to afford our Lord an opportunity of giving the Jews a

visible and ocular demonstration of his decided superiority and sovereignty over the prince of the devils and all his agents, and of his power to subdue this great adversary of the human species. He appears indeed to have been in a state of constant hostility and warfare with this wicked spirit; and in this very passage, Satan is described by our Saviour under the image of a *strong man*, whom it was necessary to bind before you could spoil his house, and exterminate him and his coadjutors, as Jesus was then doing. Yet so little were the Jews sensible of this enmity between Christ and Beelzebub, that on the contrary they charged them with being friends and confederates. They said, “this fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.” The answer of our Lord to this was decisive and satisfactory to every reasonable mind. “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation: and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand. And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?” His argument is this: how absurd and preposterous is it to suppose that Satan will act against himself, by expelling his own ministers and agents whom he has sent to take possession of the minds and bodies of men, and by assisting me to establish my religion, and thereby diffuse virtue and happiness throughout the world, which it is *his* great object to destroy, and to introduce vice and misery in their room. This must clearly end in his ruin, and the overthrow of his empire over mankind. It is evident then that it is not by *his* assistance, but by the power of God, that I cast out devils; and if so, it is clear to demonstration that I am commissioned by Heaven, to teach true religion to mankind.

I cannot quit this subject of miracles without observing what a remarkable difference there is between the sentiments of modern infidels and those of the first enemies of the gospel, respecting the miracles of Christ. The former assert, that our Saviour wrought no real miracles; that miracles are in their own nature incredible and impossible; and that no human testimony whatever can give credit to events so contrary to experience, and so repugnant to the ordinary course of nature. But go to those unbelievers who lived in the earliest ages of the gospel, and even to those who were eye-witnesses to our Lord's miracles, and they will tell you a very different story. *They* assert, that Jesus *did* work miracles; they acknowledge that he did expel evil spirits out of those that were possessed. They ascribed the miracle indeed to the power of Beelzebub, not of God. But this we know to be absurdity and nonsense. The fact of the miraculous cure they did not dispute; and this at once establishes the divine mission of our Lord. To which then of these two descriptions of infidels shall we give most credit; to those who lived near eighteen hundred years after the miracles were performed, or to those who saw them wrought with their own eyes, and though they detested the author of them, admitted the reality of his wonderful works?

Our Lord then, continuing his conversation with the Pharisees, addresses to them, in the 31st verse, these remarkable words:

“Wherefore I say unto you, all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him; but

whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come."

Our Lord's meaning in this obscure and alarming passage seems to be this; there is no other sin or blasphemy which argues such a total depravation of mind, but that it may be repented of and forgiven. Even he that speaks against me, the Son of God, and is not convinced by my preaching, may yet be afterwards converted by the power of the Holy Ghost, by the miracles which he enables me and my disciples to work, and may obtain remission of his sin. But he that shall obstinately resist this last method of conviction, (that of miracles wrought before his eyes,) and shall maliciously revile these most evident operations of the Spirit of God, contrary to the reason of his own mind and the dictates of his own conscience, such an one has no further means left by which he may be convinced and brought to repentance, and therefore can never be forgiven.

From this interpretation, which is, I believe, generally admitted to be the true one, it appears that there is no just ground for the apprehensions sometimes entertained by pious and scrupulous minds, that they may *themselves* be guilty of the sin here declared to be unpardonable, the sin against the Holy Ghost; for we see that it is confined solely and exclusively to the case before us, that is, to the crime of which the Pharisees had just been guilty, the crime of attributing those miracles to the agency of evil spirits, which were plainly wrought by the Spirit of God, and which they saw with their own eyes.

What confirms this interpretation is, that this crime is here called, not as is generally supposed, the *sin*

against the Holy Ghost, but *blasphemy* against the Holy Ghost, which evidently refers not to *actions* but to *words*; not to any thing *done* but to something *said* against the Holy Ghost. This being the case, it is clear that as miracles have long since ceased, and this blasphemy against the Holy Ghost relates solely to those who saw miracles performed with their own eyes, it is impossible for any one in these times to be literally guilty of this impious and unpardonable kind of blasphemy in its full extent.

Our Lord then addresses himself more directly to the authors of this spiteful calumny; “Either make the tree good and his fruit good, or else make the tree corrupt and his fruit corrupt; for the tree is known by his fruit;” that is, be uniform and consistent with yourselves. If you pretend to holiness and sincerity of heart, suffer not your mouths to utter these blasphemies; or if you persist in such behaviour, lay aside all claim to religion, with which this obstinate malice is as inconsistent, as it is for a tree not to discover its nature by the quality of the fruit it produces. He then adds, “O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things; for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh? A good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, bringeth forth good things; and an evil man, out of the evil treasure of his heart, bringeth forth evil things.” The import of which words is this; but it is impossible that *you* should speak otherwise than evil. You are a perverse and malicious generation, and the thoughts of men’s hearts will of course shew themselves by their words. They arise immediately from the fund within, and will necessarily discover whether it be good or bad.

Then follows another very remarkable declaration of our Lord's in the 36th verse: "I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgement." From hence some have imagined, that at the day of judgement we shall be called to an account, and punished for every idle and unprofitable, every trifling and ludicrous word that we have ever uttered in the gaiety of the heart during the whole course of our lives. If this be the case, how hard is it, will the enemies of the gospel say, in the Author of your religion, to exact from you what is utterly inconsistent with the infirmities of human nature, and which must completely destroy all the freedom, all the ease, all the cheerfulness, all the comforts of social converse, and render it necessary for every man that hopes to be saved, to seclude himself from society, and, like the once celebrated fathers of the order of La Trappe, impose upon themselves an everlasting silence! That this must be the consequence of the sentence here pronounced by our Lord, if it is to be understood in that strict, literal, and rigorous sense, which has just been stated, and which at the first view the words seem to import, cannot be denied; and therefore we may fairly conclude, that it is not the true meaning of the passage in question; because we know that we do not serve a hard master, who requires more from us than our strength will bear; but one who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and who has declared, that "his yoke is easy, and his burthen light."

In order then to set this text of scripture in its true light, we must look back to what had just passed; we must remember that the Pharisees had a little

before reproached our Lord with having cast out devils through Beelzebub the prince of the devils; and it is *this* calumny that he alludes to in the words before us; for they are a continuation of that very same conversation which he was holding with the Jews. Now the words made use of by the Pharisees in the above-mentioned charge, are not merely idle, or foolish, or trifling words, they are in the highest degree malevolent, false, and wicked; they constitute one of the grossest, most detestable, and most infamous calumnies that ever was uttered by man. Consequently by *idle* words our Saviour plainly meant, false, lying, and malicious words, such as those which the Pharisees had a few minutes before applied to *him*.

In confirmation of this, it should be observed, that the language then spoken by the Jews was not their primitive tongue, but one mixed and made up of the dialects and idioms of the several nations that surrounded them, particularly of the Chaldeans, Syrians, and Arabians. In this, our Saviour delivered all his instructions, and held all his discourses. In this (as some learned men think) St. Matthew originally wrote his gospel for the use of the Jewish converts; and it has been remarked, that in almost all the languages of which this miscellaneous one is made up, by idle or unprofitable words, are meant, false, lying, malicious, and scandalous calumnies.

But though in the passage before us, the phrase of *idle words*, refers more immediately to the malignant calumny of the Pharisees against Jesus; yet it certainly includes all false, slanderous, and vindictive accusations of our neighbour; all discourse which is in any respect injurious to God or man, which is contrary to truth, to decency, and evangelical purity

of heart. All conversation of this sort is plainly inconsistent with the sanctity of our religion, and must of course subject us to God's displeasure here, and his judgements hereafter. And even in the literal and most obvious sense of *idle words*, though we are not excluded from the innocent cheerfulness of social converse, yet we must be aware of giving way too much to trifling, foolish, unprofitable, and unmeaning talk. Even this, when carried to excess, becomes in some degree criminal ; it produces, or at least increases a frivolous turn of mind ; unfits us for the discharge of any thing manly and serious ; and indicates a degree of levity and thoughtlessness, not very consistent with a just sense of those important interests, which as candidates for heaven we should have constantly present to our thoughts, nor suitable to those awful prospects into eternity which the Christian revelation opens to our view, and which ought to make the most serious impressions on every sincere believer in the gospel of Christ.

LECTURE XI.



MATTHEW XIII.

WE are now arrived at the thirteenth chapter of St. Matthew; in which our blessed Lord introduces a new mode of conveying his instructions to the people. Hitherto he had confined himself entirely to the plain didactic method, of which his sermon on the mount is a large and a noble specimen. But his discourses now assume a different shape, and he begins in this chapter, for the first time, to address his hearers in parables. “The same day,” says the evangelist, “went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea-side; and great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore, and he spake many things unto them in *parables*.”

The word parable is sometimes used in scripture in a large and general sense, and applied to short sententious sayings, maxims, or aphorisms, expressed in a figurative, proverbial, or even poetical manner.

But in its strict and appropriate meaning, especially as applied to our Saviour’s parables, it signifies a short narrative of some event or fact, real or fictitious, in which a continued comparison is carried on between

sensible and spiritual objects; and under this similitude some important doctrine, moral or religious, is conveyed and enforced.

This mode of instruction has many advantages over every other, more particularly in recommending virtue, or reproving vice.

1. In the first place, when divine and spiritual things are represented by objects well known and familiar to us, such as present themselves perpetually to our observation, in the common occurrences of life, they are much more easily comprehended, especially by rude and uncultivated minds (that is, by the great bulk of mankind) than if they were proposed in their original form.

2. In all ages of the world, there is nothing with which mankind hath been so much delighted as with those little fictitious stories, which go under the name of fables or apologues among the ancient heathens, and of parables in the sacred writings. It is found by experience, that this sort of composition is better calculated to command attention, to captivate the imagination, to affect the heart, and to make deeper and more lasting impressions on the memory, than the most ingenious and most elegant discourses that the wit of man is capable of producing.

3. The very obscurity in which parables are sometimes involved, has the effect of exciting a greater degree of curiosity and interest, and of urging the mind to a more vigorous exertion of its faculties and powers, than any other mode of instruction. There is something for the understanding to work upon; and when the concealed meaning is at length elicited, we are apt to value ourselves on the discovery as the effect of our own penetration and discernment, and

for that very reason to pay more regard to the moral it conveys.

4. When the mind is under the influence of strong prejudices, of violent passions, or inveterate habits, and when under these circumstances it becomes necessary to rectify error, to dissipate delusion, to reprove sin, and bring the offender to a sense of his danger and his guilt; there is no way in which this difficult task can be so well executed, and the painful truths that *must* be told, so successfully insinuated into the mind, as by disguising them under the veil of a well-wrought and interesting parable.

This observation cannot be better illustrated than by referring to two parables, one in the New Testament, the other in the Old, which will amply confirm the truth, and unfold the meaning, of the preceding remarks.

The first of these which I allude to, is the celebrated parable of the good Samaritan.

The Jews, as we learn from our Lord himself, had established it as a maxim, that they were to love their neighbour and to hate their enemy*; and as they considered none as their neighbours but their own countrymen, the consequence was, that they imagined themselves at liberty to hate all the rest of the world; a liberty which they indulged without reserve, and against none with more bitterness than the contiguous nation of the Samaritans. When, therefore, the lawyer in the gospel asked our Lord, who was his neighbour? had Christ attempted to prove to him *by argument* that he was to consider all mankind, even his enemies, even the Samaritans, as his neighbours, the lawyer would have treated his answer with contempt and disdain; all his native prejudices and absurd traditions

* Matt. v. 43.

would have risen up in arms against so offensive a doctrine; nor would all the eloquence in the world, not even the divine eloquence of the Son of God himself, have been able to subdue the deep-rooted prepossessions of the obstinate Jew.

Jesus therefore, well knowing the impossibility of convincing the lawyer by any thing *he* could say, determined to make the man convince himself, and correct his own error. With this view he relates to him the parable of the Jewish traveller, who fell among robbers, was stripped and wounded, and left half dead upon the spot; and, though passed by with unfeeling indifference and neglect by his own countrymen, was at length relieved and restored to health by a compassionate Samaritan. He then asks the lawyer, who was neighbour to this distressed traveller? It was impossible for the lawyer not to answer, as he did (not foreseeing the consequence) *He that showed mercy to him; that is, the Samaritan.* Here then he at once cut up his own absurd opinion by the roots. For if the Samaritans, whom of all others the Jews most hated, were, in the true and substantial sense of the word, their *neighbours*, they were bound by their own law, by their own traditions, and by this man's own confession, to love and to assist them as such. The conclusion was therefore, *Go and do thou likewise.*

This then affords a striking proof of the efficacy of parable in correcting strong prejudices and erroneous opinions. But there is another thing still more difficult to be subdued, and that is, inveterate wickedness and hardened guilt. But this too was made to give way and humble itself in the dust by the force of parable; I mean that of Nathan.

There seems reason to believe that King David,

after he had committed the complicated crime of adultery and murder, had by some means or other contrived to lull his conscience to sleep, and to suppress the risings of any painful reflection in his mind. This appears almost incredible, yet so the fact seems to have been; and it shows in the strongest light the extreme deceitfulness of sin, its astonishing power over the mind of man, and the inveterate depravity of the human heart. When we see a man who had perpetrated such atrocious deeds, totally insensible of his guilt, and not discovering the slightest resemblance to his own case in the affecting and awakening story which the prophet related, it affords a striking and a melancholy proof what human nature is when left to itself, even in the best of men: even in those who, like King David, are, in the general tenour of their life, actuated by right principles, and even animated (as he evidently was) with the warmest sentiments of piety and devotion. And it demonstrates in the clearest manner the absolute necessity of that help from above in the discharge of our duty, which the Christian revelation holds out to us, and which men of the world are so apt to despise and deride as a weak delusion and fanatical imagination; I mean the divine influences of the Holy Spirit: without which there is not a single individual here present, however highly he may think of the natural rectitude and invincible integrity of his own mind, who may not in an evil hour, when he least thinks of it, be betrayed by some powerful and unexpected temptation into as much guilt, and become as blind to his own situation, as was that unhappy prince of whom we are now speaking.

It was indispensably necessary to rouse the sinner

out of this dreadful lethargy; but how was this to be done? Had Nathan plainly and directly charged him with all the enormity of his guilt, the probability is, that either in the first transport of his resentment, he would have driven the prophet from his presence, or that he would have attempted to palliate, to soften, to explain away his crime; would have pleaded the strength of his passion or the violence of the temptation, and perhaps claimed some indulgence for his rank and situation in life. But all these pleas were at once silenced, and his retreat completely cut off, by making him the judge of his own case, and forcing his condemnation out of his own mouth. For after he had denounced death on the rich man for taking away the ewe lamb of the poor one, he could with no decency pretend that he who had destroyed the life of *one* fellow-creature, and the innocence of *another*, was deserving of a milder sentence.

There was nothing then left for him but to confess at once, as he did, "that he had sinned against the Lord;" and his penitence we know was as severe and exemplary as his crime had been atrocious.

It is much to be lamented that these indirect methods should be found necessary, in order to show men to themselves, and acquaint them with their real characters, especially when it is their own interest not to be mistaken in so important a concern. But the wise and the virtuous in every age have condescended to make use of this innocent artifice; the necessity of which is founded in the sad corruption of human nature, and in that gross and deplorable blindness to their own sins and follies, which is observable in so large a part of mankind. They engage with

warmth and eagerness in worldly pursuits, which employ their attention and excite their passions; so that they have little time, and less inclination, to reflect calmly and seriously on their own conduct, in a moral and religious point of view. But if their thoughts *are* at any time forced inwards, and they cannot help taking a view of themselves, a deeper source of delusion is still behind. The same actions which, when committed by others, are immediately discerned to be wrong, are palliated, explained, qualified, and apologized away, when we happen to be guilty of them ourselves. The circumstances in the two cases are discovered to be perfectly different in some essential point; our passions were ungovernable, the temptation irresistible. In short, somehow or other, all guilt vanishes away under the management of the dexterous casuist, and the intrusion of self-condemnation is effectually precluded.

Still there remains, it may be said, the admonition of some zealous friend or faithful instructor; but zeal is generally vehement, and often indiscreet. By exciting the resentment and inflaming the anger of those it means to reform, it frequently defeats its own designs. For whoever is offended, instantly forgets his own faults, and dwells wholly upon those of his imprudent monitor. But when the veil of parable conceals for a moment from the offender that he is himself concerned in it, he may generally be surprised into a condemnation of every one that is guilty of a base dishonourable action; and when the unexpected application, *Thou art the man*, comes thundering suddenly upon him, and points out the perfect similarity of the supposed case to his own, the astonished

criminal, overwhelmed with confusion, and driven from all his usual subterfuges and evasions, is compelled at length to condemn himself.

It was probably the consideration of these delusions, and the other reasons above assigned, which gave rise to so general and so ancient a custom of conveying moral instruction under the cover of imaginary agents and fictitious events. We find traces of it in the earliest writers; and it was more peculiarly cultivated in the east, the region where religion and science first took their rise. The most ancient parables perhaps on record are those we meet with in the Old Testament; that of Jotham, for instance, where the trees desired the bramble to reign over them*; that of Nathan†; that of the woman of Tekoah‡; in the reign of David; and that of the thistle and the cedar of Lebanon§, by Jehoshaphat, king of Israel. From the east, this species of composition passed into Greece and Italy, and thence into the rest of Europe; and there are two celebrated writers, one in the Greek, the other in the Roman tongue, whose fables every one is acquainted with from their earliest years. These, it must be owned, are elegant, amusing, and, in a certain degree, moral and instructive; but they are not in any degree to be compared with the parables of our blessed Lord, which infinitely excel *them*, and every other composition of that species, in many essential points.

1. In the first place, the fables of the ancients are many of them of a very trivial nature, or at the best contain nothing more than maxims of mere worldly wisdom and common prudence, and sometimes perhaps a little moral instruction.

But the parables of our blessed Lord relate to

* Judges ix. 14. † 2 Sam. xii. 1. ‡ 2 Sam. xiv. § 2 Kings xiv. 2.

subjects of the very highest importance; to the great leading principles of human conduct, to the essential duties of man, to the nature and progress of the Christian religion, to the moral government of the world, to the great distinctions between vice and virtue, to the awful scenes of eternity, to the divine influences of the Holy Spirit, to the great work of our redemption, to a resurrection and a future judgement, and the distribution of rewards and punishments in a future state; and all this expressed with a dignity of sentiment, and a simplicity of language, perfectly well suited to the grandeur of the subject.

2. In the next place, the fables of the learned heathens, though entertaining and well composed, are in general cold and dry, and calculated more to please the understanding than to touch the heart. Whereas, those of our blessed Lord are most of them in the highest degree affecting and interesting. Such for instance are the parable of the lost sheep, of the prodigal son, of the rich man and Lazarus, of the Pharisee and publican, of the unforgiving servant, of the good Samaritan. There is nothing in all heathen antiquity to be compared to these; nothing that speaks so forcibly to our tenderest feelings and affections, and leaves such deep and lasting impressions upon the soul.

3dly. The Greek and Roman fables are most of them founded on improbable or impossible circumstances, and are supposed conversations between animate or inanimate beings, not endowed with the power of speech; between birds, beasts, reptiles, and trees; a circumstance which shocks the imagination, and of course weakens the force of the instruction.

Our Saviour's parables, on the contrary, are all of them images and allusions taken from nature, and

from occurrences which are most familiar to our observation and experience in common life; and the events related are not only such as might very probably happen, but several of them are supposed to be such as actually did; and this would have the effect of a true historical narrative, which we all know to carry much greater weight and authority with it than the most ingenious fiction. Of the former sort are the rich man and Lazarus, of the good Samaritan, and of the prodigal son. There are others in which our Saviour seems to allude to some historical facts which happened in those times; as that wherein it is said, that a king went into a far country, there to receive a kingdom.

This probably refers to the history of Archeläus, who, after the death of his father, Herod the Great, went to Rome to receive from Augustus the confirmation of his father's will, by which he had the kingdom of Judæa left to him.

These circumstances give a decided superiority to our Lord's parables over the fables of the ancients; and if we compare them with those of the Koran, the difference is still greater. The parables of Mahomet are trifling, uninteresting, tedious, and dull. Among other things which he has borrowed from scripture, one is the parable of Nathan, in which he has most ingeniously contrived to destroy all its spirit, force, and beauty; and has so completely distorted and deformed its whole texture and composition, that if the commentator had not informed you, in very gentle terms, that it is the parable of Nathan *a little disguised*, you would scarcely have known it to be the same. Such is the difference between a prophet who is really inspired, and an impostor who pretends to be so.

Nor is it only in his parables, but in his other discourses to the people, that Jesus draws his doctrines and instructions from the scenes of nature, from the objects that surrounded him, from the most common occurrences of life, from the seasons of the year, from some extraordinary incidents or remarkable transactions. “ Thus, as a learned and ingenious writer has observed*, upon curing a blind man, he styles himself the light of the world, and reproves the Pharisees for their spiritual blindness and inexcusable obstinacy in refusing to be cured and enlightened by him. On little children being brought to him, he recommends the innocence, the simplicity, the meekness, the humility, the docility of that lovely age, as indispensable qualifications for those that would enter into the kingdom of heaven. Beholding the flowers of the field, and the fowls of the air, he teaches his disciples to frame right and worthy notions of that Providence which supports and adorns them, and will therefore assuredly not neglect the superior order of rational beings. Observing the fruits of the earth, he instructs them to judge of men by their fruitfulness under all the means of grace. From the mention of meat and drink, he leads them to the sacred rite of eating his body and drinking his blood in a spiritual sense. From external ablutions, he deduces the necessity of purifying the heart, and cleansing the affections. Those that were fishers, he teaches to be fishers of men; to draw them by the force of argument and persuasion, aided by the influence of divine grace, to the belief and practice of true religion. Seeing the money-changers, he exhorts his disciples to lay out their several talents to the best advantage. Being among

* See Bishop Law's Considerations on the Theory of Religion.

the sheep-folds, he proves himself the true shepherd of souls. Among vines, he discourses of the spiritual husbandman and vine-dresser, and draws a parallel between *his* vineyard and the natural one. Upon the appearance of summer in the trees before him, he points out evident signs of his approaching kingdom. When the harvest comes on, he reminds his disciples of the spiritual harvest, the harvest of true believers; and exhorts them to labour diligently in that work, and add their prayers to heaven for its success. From servants being made free in the sabbatical year, he takes occasion to proclaim a nobler emancipation and more important redemption from the slavery of sin, and the bondage of corruption, by the death of Christ. From the eminence of a city standing on a hill, he turns his discourse to the conspicuous situation of his own disciples. From the temple before him, he points to that of his own body; and from Herod's unadvisedly leading out his army to meet the King of Arabia, who came against him with a superior force and defeated him, a lesson is held out to all who entered on the Christian warfare, that they should first well weigh and carefully compute the difficulties attending it, and by the grace of God resolve to surmount them.

In the same manner, when he delivered the parable of the sower, which we find in this chapter, and which will be the next subject of our consideration, it was probably seed time, and from the ship in which he taught he might observe the husbandmen scattering their seed upon the earth. From thence he took occasion to illustrate, by that rural and familiar image, the different effects which the doctrines of Christianity had on different men, according to the different tem-

pers and dispositions that they happened to meet with.

“Behold (says he,) a sower went forth to sow. And when he sowed, some fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up. Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth, and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth; and when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundred fold, some sixty fold, some thirty fold.” As our blessed Lord, soon after he had uttered this parable, explained it to his disciples, it is highly proper that you should have this explanation in his own words. “Hear ye, therefore (says he) the parable of the sower. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way-side. But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself but dureth for a while; for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by-and-by he is offended. He also that received seed among the thorns, is he that heareth the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. But he that received seed into the good ground, is he that heareth the word and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth some an hundred fold, some sixty, some thirty.”

Such is the parable of the sower, and the explanation of it by our Saviour; which will furnish us with abundant matter for a great variety of very important reflections. But as these cannot be distinctly stated and sufficiently enlarged upon at present, without going to a considerable length of time, and trespassing too far on that patience and indulgence which I have already but too often put to the test, I must reserve for my next Lecture the observations I have to offer on this very interesting and instructive parable.

LECTURE XII.

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MATTHEW, CHAP. XIII. CONTINUED.

THE last Lecture concluded with a recital of the parable of the sower, and our Lord's explanation of it; and I now proceed to lay before you those reflections which it has suggested to my mind.

In the first place then it must be observed, that this parable, like many others, is prophetic as well as instructive; it predicts the fate of the Christian religion in the world, and the different sorts of reception it will meet with from different men. And as this prediction is completely verified by the present state of religion, as we see it at this hour existing among ourselves, it affords one very decisive proof of Christ's power of foreseeing future events, and of course tends strongly to establish the truth of his pretensions, and the divine authority of his religion.

In the next place, it is evident that there are four different classes of men here described, which comprehend all the different religious or irreligious characters that are to be met with in the world. The first consists of those "that hear the word of the kingdom (as our Lord expresses it) and understand it not; then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in their hearts. These are they (says he)

which received seed by the way-side." By these are meant those persons whose minds, like the beaten high road, are hard and impenetrable, and inaccessible to conviction. Of these, we all know there are too many in the world; some who have imbibed early and deep-rooted prejudices against Christianity; who, either conceiving themselves superior to the rest of mankind in genius, knowledge, and penetration, reject with scorn whatever the bulk of mankind receives with veneration, and erect favourite systems of their own, which they conceive to be the very perfection of human wisdom; or, on the other hand, having been unfortunately very early initiated in the writings of modern philosophists, implicitly adopt the opinions of those whom they consider as the great luminaries and oracles of the age, receive ridicule as argument, and assertion as proof, and prefer the silly witticisms, the specious sophistry, the metaphysical subtlety, the coarse buffoonery, which distinguish many of the most popular opponents of our faith, to the simplicity, dignity, and sublimity of the divine truths of the gospel. These are the professed infidels, or, as they choose to style themselves, the disciples of philosophy and reason, and the enemies of priestcraft, fanaticism, and superstition.

But besides these, there is another description of men, on whom the good seed makes little or no impression; these are the thoughtless, the inattentive, the inconsiderate, the trifling, the gay, who think of nothing beyond the present scene, and who do not consider themselves as in the smallest degree interested in any thing else. These men, without professing themselves unbelievers, without formally and explicitly rejecting the gospel, yet do in fact never concern them-

selves about it. It forms no part of their system, it does not at all enter into their plans of life. The former sort above described are infidels on principle; these are practical infidels, without any principle at all. Being born of Christian parents, and instructed perhaps in the first rudiments of Christianity, they call themselves Christians; they attend divine service, they repeat their prayers, they listen to the discourses of the preacher, they make no objections to what they hear, they question not the propriety of what they are taught; but here their religion ends; it never goes beyond the surface, it never penetrates into their hearts, *it lies on the hard beaten highway*. The instant they leave the church, every idea of religion vanishes out of their thoughts; they never reflect for one moment on what they have heard; they never consider the infinite importance of what is to happen after death; the awful prospects of eternity never present themselves to their minds, neither excite their hopes nor alarm their fears. “With their mouths indeed they confess the Lord Jesus, but they do not believe with their hearts unto salvation:” and although perhaps in the wide waste of a trifling insignificant life, a few worthy actions or a few solitary virtues appear, yet their affections are not set on things above, their hopes are not centered there, their views do not tend there; their treasure is on earth, and there is their heart also.

These two characters, the hardened unbeliever, and the mere nominal Christian, constitute the first class described by our Saviour in the parable of the sower. These are they which receive the seed by the way-side, where it lies neglected upon the surface, till “the fowls of the air devour it, or the wicked one catcheth it out of their hearts;” and there is an end

at once of all their hopes of salvation, perhaps for ever.

Secondly: There is another sort of soil mentioned in the parable, which gives the seed at first a more favourable reception. When it falls on stony ground, it finds no great difficulty in gaining admission into a little loose earth scattered upon a rock; it springs up with amazing rapidity; but no sooner “does the sun rise upon it with its scorching heat, than it withers away for want of depth of earth, root, and moisture.”

What a lively representation is this of weak and unstable Christians! They receive Christianity at first with gladness; they are extremely ready to be made eternally happy, and suppose that they have nothing else to do but to repeat their creed, and take possession of heaven. But when they find that there are certain conditions to be performed on *their* parts also; that they must give up their favourite interests and restrain their strongest passions, must sometimes even pluck out a right eye or tear off a right arm; that they must take up their cross and follow a crucified Saviour through many difficulties, distresses, and persecutions; their ardour and alacrity are instantly extinguished. They want strength of mind, soundness of principle, and sincerity of faith to support them. No wonder then that they fall away and depart from their allegiance to their divine Master and Redeemer. This is the second sort of hearers described in the parable, “that receive the word at first with joy; but having no root in themselves, when tribulation and persecution arise because of the word, by-and-by they are offended.” This refers more immediately to the first disciples and first preachers of the gospel, who were exposed, in the discharge of their high office, to the

severest trials, and the cruelest persecutions from their numerous and powerful enemies. Some of them undoubtedly, who had not sufficient root in themselves, gave way to the storms that assailed them, and made shipwreck of their faith, as our Lord here foretells that they would. But others, we know, stood, firm and unmoved, amidst the most tremendous dangers, and underwent, with unparalleled fortitude, the most excruciating torments. The description which the writer to the Hebrews gives of the saints and prophets of old, may, with the strictest truth, be applied to the apostles and their successors in the first ages of the gospel, under the various persecutions to which they were exposed. “ They had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword, were destitute, afflicted, tormented *.” All these barbarities they endured with unshaken patience and firmness, and thereby bore the strongest possible testimony, not only to their own sincerity, but to the divine and miraculous influence of the religion which they taught. For it is justly and forcibly observed by the excellent Mr. Addison, that the astonishing and unexampled fortitude which was shown by innumerable multitudes of martyrs, in those slow and painful torments that were inflicted on them, is nothing less than *a standing miracle* during the three first centuries. “ I cannot,” says he, “ conceive a man placed in the burning iron chair of Lyons, amidst the insults and mockeries of a crowded amphitheatre, and still keeping his seat; or stretched upon a grate of iron over an intense fire, and breathing out his soul amidst the

* Heb. xi. 36, 37.

exquisite sufferings of such a tedious execution, rather than renounce his religion, or blaspheme his Saviour, without supposing something supernatural. Such trials seem to me above the strength of human nature, and able to overbear duty, reason, faith, conviction, nay, and the most absolute certainty of a future state. We can easily imagine that a few persons in so good a cause might have laid down their lives at the gibbet, the stake, or the block: but that *multitudes* of each sex, of every age, of different countries and conditions, should, for nearly three hundred years together, expire leisurely amidst the most exquisite tortures, rather than apostatize from the truth, has something in it so far beyond the natural strength and force of mortals, that one cannot but conclude there was some miraculous power to support the sufferers; and if so, here is at once a proof, from history and from fact, of the divine origin of our religion*.”

There is a third portion of the seed, that falls among thorns. This wants neither root nor depth of earth. It grows up; but the misfortune is, that the thorns grow up with it. The fault of the soil is not that of bearing nothing, but of bearing too much; of bearing what it ought not, of exhausting its strength and nutrition on vile and worthless productions, which choke the good seed, and prevent it from coming to perfection. “These are they (says our Saviour, in the parallel place of St. Luke) which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with the cares, and riches, and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.” In their youth perhaps they receive religious instruction, they imbibe right principles, and listen to good advice: but no sooner do they *go forth*,

* Addison's Evidences, S. 7.

no sooner do they leave those persons and those places from whom they receive them, than they take the road either of business or of pleasure, pursue their interests, their amusements, or their guilty indulgencies, with unbounded eagerness, and have neither time nor inclination to cultivate the seeds of religion that have been sown in their hearts, and to eradicate the weeds that have been mingled with them. The consequence is, that the weeds prevail, and the seeds are choked and lost.

Can there possibly be a more faithful picture of a large proportion of the Christian world? Let us look around us, and observe how the greater part of those we meet with are employed. In what is it that their thoughts are busied, their views, their hopes, and their fears centered, their attention occupied, their hearts and souls and affections engaged? Is it in searching the scriptures, in meditating on its doctrines, its precepts, its exhortations, its promises and its threats? Is it in communing with their own hearts, in probing them to the very bottom, in looking carefully whether there be any way of wickedness in them, in plucking out every noxious weed, and leaving room for the good seed to grow and swell and expand itself, and bring forth fruit to perfection? Is it in cultivating purity of manners, a spirit of charity towards the whole human race, and the most exalted sentiments of piety, gratitude, and love towards their Maker and Redeemer? These I fear are far from being the general and principal occupations of mankind. Too many of them are, God knows, very differently employed. They are overwhelmed with business, they are devoted to amusement, they are immersed in sensuality, they are mad with ambition, they are

idolaters of wealth, of power, of glory, of fame. On these things all their affections are fixed. These are the great objects of their pursuit; and if any accidental thought of religion happens to cross their way, they instantly dismiss the unbidden, unwelcome guest, with the answer of Felix to Paul, “Go thy way for this time; when we have a convenient season, we will send for thee.”

But how then, it is said, are we to conduct ourselves? If Providence has blessed us with riches, with honour, with power, with reputation, are we to reject these gifts of our heavenly Father; or ought we not rather to accept them with thankfulness, and enjoy with gratitude the advantages and the comforts which his bounty has bestowed upon us? Most assuredly we ought. But then they are to be enjoyed also with innocence, with temperance, and with moderation. They must not be allowed to usurp the first place in our hearts. They must not be permitted to supplant God in our affection, or to dispute that pre-eminence and priority which he claims over every propensity of our nature. This, and this only, can prevent the good seed from being choked with the cares, the riches, and the pleasures of the present life.

We now come, in the last place, to the seed which fell on good ground, which our Lord tells us, in St. Luke, denotes those that in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience, some an hundred fold, some sixty, some thirty.

We here see that the first and principal qualification for hearing the word of God, for keeping it, for rendering it capable of bringing forth fruit, is *an honest and a good heart*; that is, a heart free from all those

evil dispositions and corrupt passions which blind the eyes, distort the understanding, and obstruct the admission of divine truth; a heart perfectly clear from prejudice, from pride, from vanity, from self-sufficiency, and self-conceit; a heart sincerely disposed and earnestly desirous to find out the truth, and firmly resolved to embrace it when found; ready to acknowledge its own ignorance, weakness, and corruption, and “to receive with meekness the ingrafted word, which is able to save the soul.”

This is that innocence and simplicity and singleness of mind, which we find so frequently recommended and so highly applauded by our blessed Lord, and which is so beautifully and feelingly described when young children were brought to him that he should touch them, and were checked by his disciples. “Suffer the little children to come unto me, (says he) and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God;” and then he adds, “Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein*.” Here, in a few words, and by a most significant and affecting emblem, is expressed that temper and disposition of mind which is the most essential qualification for the kingdom of heaven. Unless we come to the gospel with that meekness, gentleness, docility, and guileless simplicity, which constitute the character of a child, and render him so lovely and captivating, we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven; we cannot either assent to the evidence, believe the doctrines, or obey the precepts of the Christian religion. Hence we see the true reason why so many men of distinguished talents have rejected the religion of Christ. It is not because its

* Mark x. 14, 15.

evidences are defective, or its doctrines repugnant to reason; it is because their dispositions were the very reverse of what the gospel requires; because (as their writings evidently show) they were high-spirited, violent, proud, conceited, vain, disdainful, and sometimes profligate too; because, in short, they wanted that honest and good heart, which not only receives the good seed, but keeps it, and nourishes it with unceasing patience, till it bring forth fruit to perfection. They could not enter into the marriage feast, because they had not on the wedding garment, because they were not *clothed with humility**. For, “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble. Them that are meek, shall he guide in judgement; and such as are gentle, them shall he learn his way †.”

But here arises a difficulty on which the enemies of our faith lay great stress, and frequently allege as an excuse for their infidelity and impiety. If, say they, the success of the good seed depends on the soil in which it is sown, the success of the gospel must, in the same manner, depend (as this very parable is meant to prove) on the temper and disposition of the recipient, of the person to whom it is offered. Now this temper and disposition are not of our own making: they are the work of nature; they are what our Creator has given us. If then, in any particular instance, they are unfortunately such as disqualify us for the reception of the gospel, the fault is not ours; it is in the soil, it is in our natural constitution, for which surely we cannot be held responsible.

This plea is specious and plausible; but it is nothing more. The fact is, that the imbecility and corruption introduced into our moral frame by the fall of our first

* 2 Pet. v. 5.

† James iv. 6. Psalm xxv. 9.

parents, is in some measure felt by all; but undoubtedly in different individuals shows itself in different degrees, and *that* from their very earliest years. Look at any large family of children living together under the eye of their parents, and you will frequently discover in them a surprising variety of tempers, humours, and dispositions; and although the same instructions are given to all, the same care and attention, the same discipline, the same vigilance exercised over each, yet some shall be, in their general conduct, meek, gentle, and submissive; others impetuous, passionate, and froward; some active, enterprising, and bold; others quiet, contented, and calm; some cunning, artful, and close; others open, frank, and ingenuous; some, in short, malevolent, mischievous, and unfeeling; others kind, compassionate, good-natured, and though sometimes betraying the infirmity of human nature by casual omissions of duty and errors of conduct, yet soon made sensible of their faults, and easily led back to regularity, order, piety, and virtue.

Here then is unquestionably the difference of natural constitution contended for. But what is the true inference? Is it that those whose dispositions are the worst are to give themselves up for lost, are to abandon all hopes of salvation, and to allege their depraved nature as a sufficient apology for infidelity or vice, as constituting a complete inability either to believe or to obey the gospel? No such thing. On the contrary, it is a strong and powerful call, first upon their parents and the guides of their youth, and afterwards upon themselves, to watch over, to restrain, to correct, to amend, to meliorate their evil dispositions, and to supply by attention, by discipline, and by prayer, what has been denied by nature. It may be thought

hard, perhaps, that all this care, and labour, and painful conflict, should be necessary to some and not (in the same degree at least) to others; and that so marked a distinction in so important a point should be made between creatures of the same species. But is not the same distinction made in other points of importance? Are not men placed from their very birth by the hand of Providence in different situations of rank, power, wealth? Are not some indulged with every advantage, every blessing that their hearts can wish, and others sunk in obscurity, penury, and wretchedness? Are not some favoured with the most splendid talents and capacities for acquiring knowledge; others slow in conception, weak in understanding, and almost impenetrable to instruction? Are not some blessed from their birth with strong, healthy, robust constitutions, subject to no infirmities, no diseases; others weak, sickly, tender, liable to perpetual disorders, and with the utmost difficulty dragging on a precarious existence? Yet does this preclude all these different individuals from improving their condition; does it prevent the lowest member of society from endeavouring to raise himself into a superior class; does it prevent the most indigent from labouring to acquire a fortune by industry, frugality, and activity; does it prevent the most ignorant from cultivating their minds, and furnishing them with some degree of knowledge; does it prevent those of the tenderest and most delicate frames from strengthening, confirming, and invigorating their health, by management, by medicine, and by temperance? We see the contrary every day; we see all these different characters succeeding in their efforts beyond their most sanguine expectations, and rising to a degree of opulence, of rank, of power, of learning,

and of health, of which at their outset they could not have formed the most distant idea. And why then are we not to act in the same manner with regard to our natural tempers, dispositions, propensities, and inclinations? Why are we not to suppose *them* as capable of improvement and melioration as our condition, our fortune, our intellectual powers, and our bodily health? Why are we to allege impossibility in one case more than in the others? The truth is, that a bad constitution of mind as well as of body may, by proper care and attention, and the powerful influences of the Holy Spirit, be greatly, if not wholly, amended. And as it sometimes happens that they who have the weakest and most distempered frames, by means of an exact regimen, and an unshaken perseverance in rule and method, outlive those of a robuster make and more luxuriant health; so there are abundant instances where men of the most perverse dispositions and most depraved turn of mind, by keeping a steady guard upon their weak parts, and gradually, but continually, correcting their defects, applying earnestly for assistance from above, going on from strength to strength, and from one degree of perfection to another, have at length arrived at a higher pitch of virtue than those for whom nature had done much more, and who would therefore do but little for themselves.

Let us then never despair. If we have not from constitution that honest and good heart which is necessary for receiving the good seed, and bringeth forth fruit with patience, we may by degrees, and by the blessing of God, gradually acquire it. If the soil is not originally good, it may be made so by labour and cultivation; but above all, by imploring our heavenly Father to shower down upon it the plentiful effusions

of his grace, which he has promised to all that devoutly and fervently and constantly pray for it. This dew from heaven, “shed abroad in our hearts*,” will refresh and invigorate and purify our souls; will correct the very worst disposition; will soften and subdue the hardest and most ungrateful soil, will make it clean and pure and moist, fit for the reception of the good seed; and notwithstanding its original poverty and barrenness, will enrich it with strength and vigour sufficient to bring forth fruit to perfection.

I have now finished these Lectures for the present year, and must, on this occasion, again entreat you to let those truths, to which you have listened with so much patience and perseverance, take entire possession of your hearts. They are not vain, they are not trivial things, they are the words of eternal life; they relate to the most important of all human concerns, to the most essential interests and comfort of the present life, and to the destiny, the eternal destiny, of happiness or misery that awaits you in the next.

You have just heard the parable of the sower explained, and it behoves you to consider in which of the four classes of men there described you can fairly rank yourselves. Are you in the number of those that receive the seed by the way-side, on hearts as impenetrable and inaccessible to conviction as the hard-beaten high-road? or of those that receive the seed on a little loose earth scattered on a rock, where it quickly springs up, and as quickly withers away? or of those in whom the seed is choked with thorns, with the occupations and pleasures of this life? or, lastly, of those who receive the seed on good ground, on an honest and good heart, and bring forth fruit, some

* Romans v. 5.

a hundred fold, some sixty, some thirty? It becomes every one of you to ask yourselves this question very seriously, and to answer it very honestly; for on that depends the whole colour of your future condition here and hereafter.

There are none I trust here present, there are few I believe in this country, who fall under the first description of professed and hardened unbelievers; and amidst many painful circumstances of these awful and anxious times, it is some consolation to us to reflect, that the incredible pains which have been taken in a multitude of vile publications to induce the people of this country to apostatize from their religion, have not made that general and permanent impression on their minds which might naturally have been expected from such malignant and reiterated efforts to shake their principles and subvert their faith. But there are other instruments of perversion and corruption, much more formidable and more powerful than these. There are rank and noxious weeds and thorns, which grow up with the good seed and choke it, and prevent it from coming to maturity. These are, as the parable tells us, the cares, the riches, and the pleasures of this world, which in our passage through life lay hold upon our hearts, and are more dangerous obstructions to the gospel than all the speculative arguments and specious sophistry of all its adversaries put together. It is but seldom, I believe, comparatively speaking, that men are fairly reasoned out of their religion. But they are very frequently seduced, both from the practice and the belief of it, by treacherous passions within and violent temptations from without, by "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life." These are in fact the most common, the most powerful

enemies of our faith. These are the weeds and the thorns that twist themselves round every fibre of our hearts, which impede the growth and destroy the fruitfulness of every good principle that has been implanted there, and form that third and most numerous class of hearers described in the parable of the sower, who, though not professed infidels, are yet practical unbelievers, and who, though they retain the form, have lost all the substance, all the power, all the life and soul of religion.

It is then against these most dangerous corrupters of our fidelity and allegiance to our heavenly Master, that we must principally be upon our guard; it is against these we must arm and prepare our souls, by summoning all our fortitude and resolution, and calling in to our aid, all those spiritual succours which the power of prayer can draw down upon us from above. It was to assist us in this arduous conflict, that the compilers of our liturgy appointed the season of Lent, and more particularly the offices of the concluding week, which, from the sufferings of our Saviour at that time, we call *Passion week*. It was thought, and surely it was wisely thought by our ancestors, that to fortify ourselves against the attractions of the world, and the seductions of sin, it was necessary to withdraw ourselves sometimes from the tumultuous and intoxicating scenes of business and of pleasure, which, in the daily commerce of life, press so close on every side of us; and to strengthen and confirm our minds against their fatal influence, by retirement, by recollection, by self-communion, by self-examination, by meditating on the word of God, and, above all, by frequent and fervent prayer. To give us time for these sacred occupations, a small portion of every year has

been judiciously set apart for them by our church; and what time could be so proper for those holy purposes, as that in which our blessed Lord was suffering so much for our sakes? I allude more particularly to that solemn week which is now approaching, and to which I must beg to call the most serious attention of every one here present.

In that week all public diversions are, as you well know, wisely prohibited by public authority; and in conformity to the spirit of such prohibition, we should, even in our own families and in our own private amusements, be temperate, modest, decorous, and discreet. Think not, however, that I am here recommending gloom and melancholy, and seclusion from all society; far from it. This could answer no other purpose but to sour your minds and to deaden your devotions. The cheerfulness of social converse and friendly intercourse is by no means inconsistent with the duties of the week; but all those tumultuous assemblies, which are too strongly marked with an air of levity, gaiety, and dissipation, and may in fact be ranked in the number of *public* diversions, are plainly repugnant to that seriousness and tenderness of mind, which the awful and interesting events of that week must naturally inspire. Let me only request you to read over, when you return home, that plain, simple, unaffected, yet touching narrative of our Saviour's sufferings, which is selected from the gospels, in the daily offices of the next week; and then ask your own hearts whether, at the very time when your Redeemer is supposed to have passed through all those dreadful scenes for your sakes and for your salvation, from his first agony in the garden to his last expiring groan upon the cross, whether at this very time you can bring yourselves to

pursue the pleasures, the vanities, and the follies of the world, with the same unqualified eagerness and unabated ardour, as if nothing had happened which had given him the slightest pain, or in which you had the smallest interest or concern. Your hearts, I am sure, will revolt at the very idea, and your own feelings will preserve you from thus wantonly sporting with the cross of Christ. And if to a prudent abstinence from these things you were to add a careful inquiry into your past conduct, and the present state of your souls, if you were to extend your views to another world, and consider what your condition there is likely to be; what reasonable grounds you have to hope for a favourable sentence from your Almighty Judge; how far you have conformed to the commands of your Maker, and what degree of affection and gratitude you have manifested for the inexpressible kindness of your Redeemer; this surely would be an employment not inconsistent with your necessary occupations, and not unsuitable to humble candidates for pardon, acceptance, and immortal happiness.

Is this too great a burthen to be imposed upon us for a few days; is it too great a sacrifice of our time, our thoughts and our amusements, to an invisible world, and a reversionary inheritance of inestimable value? It certainly is, if the gospel be all a fabricated tale. But if it contain the words of soberness and truth; if its divine authority is established by such an accumulation of evidence of various kinds, as never before concurred to prove any other facts or events in the history of the world, by evidences springing from different sources, yet all centering in the same point, and converging to the same conclusion; if even the few incidental proofs that have been offered to your

consideration in the course of these Lectures have produced that conviction in your minds which they seem to have done; what then is the consequence? Is it not that truths of such infinite importance well deserve all that consideration for which I am now contending; and that we ought to embrace with eagerness every appointed means and every favourable opportunity that is thrown in our way, of demonstrating our attachment and our gratitude to a crucified Saviour, who died for our sins, and rose again for our justification, and will come once more in glory to judge the world in righteousness, and to distribute his rewards and punishments to all the nations of the earth assembled before him? At that awful tribunal may we all appear with a humble confidence in the merits of our Redeemer, and a trembling hope of that mercy which he has promised to every sincere believer, every truly contrite and penitent offender!

LECTURE XIII.

MATTHEW XIII. CONTINUED.

THE Lectures of the last year concluded with an explanation of the parable of the sower; and immediately after this follows in the gospel the parable of the tares, which will be the subject of our present consideration*.

The parable is as follows: "The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field; from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together unto the harvest; and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them up in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn."

* Matt. xiii. 24.

After our Lord had delivered this parable, and one or two more very short ones, we are told that he sent the multitude away, and went into the house; and his disciples came unto him, saying, “Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field. He answered and said unto them, He that sowed the good seed is the Son of man. The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom, but the tares are the children of the wicked one. The enemy that sowed them is the devil: the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father: who hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

This parable well deserves our most serious consideration, as it gives an answer to two questions of great curiosity and great importance, which have exercised the ingenuity and agitated the minds of thinking men from the earliest times to the present, and perhaps were never, at any period of the world, more interesting than at this very hour,

The first of these questions is, How came moral evil into the world?

The next is, Why is it suffered to remain a single moment; and why is not every wicked man immediately punished as he deserves?

The first of these questions has, we know, in almost all ages, and in all countries, been a constant subject of investigation and controversy among metaphysicians

and theologians, and has given birth to an infinity of fanciful theories and systems, to one more particularly in our own times, by a man of very distinguished talents*; all which however have failed of solving the difficulty, and have proved nothing more than this mortifying and humiliating truth, namely, the extreme weakness of the human intellect, when applied to subjects so far above its reach, and the utter inability of man to fathom the counsels of the Most High, and develope the mysterious ways of his providence, by the sole strength of unassisted reason†. That those who were never favoured with the light of revelation should indulge themselves in such abstruse speculations, can be no great wonder; but that they who have access to the original fountain of truth, and can draw from that sacred source the most authentic information on this point, should have recourse to the fallible conjectures of human ingenuity, and should hew out to themselves “cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water,” is a most unaccountable error of judgement, and a strange misapplication of talents, and waste of labour and of time. We are told, in the very beginning of the Bible, that he who first brought sin or moral evil into the world, was that great adversary of the human race, the devil, who first tempted the

* Soame Jenyns.

† Among the dissertations of Plutarch (which go by the name of his *Morals*), there is a very curious and ingenious one, entitled *περὶ τῶν ὑπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἑραδέως τιμωρομένων*, concerning those whom the Deity is slow in punishing. In this, among other just remarks, he observes, “that many things which great generals, and legislators, and statesmen do, are to common observers incomprehensible. What wonder is it then, (says he) if we cannot understand why the gods inflict punishment on the wicked, sometimes at an earlier, sometimes at a later period?”

woman, and she the man, to act in direct contradiction to the commands of their Maker.

This act of disobedience destroyed at once that innocence and purity and integrity of mind, with which they came out of the hands of their Creator; gave an immediate and dreadful shock to their whole moral frame, and introduced into it all those corrupt propensities, and disordered passions, which they bequeathed as a fatal legacy to their descendants; of which we all now feel the bitter fruits, and have, I fear, by our own personal and voluntary transgressions, not a little improved the wretched inheritance we received from our ancestors. This is the true origin of moral evil; and it is expressly confirmed by our Saviour in the parable before us; in which, when the servants of the householder express their surprise at finding tares among the wheat, and ask whence they came, his answer is, *An enemy hath done this*; and that enemy, our Lord informs us, is the devil; that inveterate, implacable enemy (as the very name of Satan imports) of the human race, the original author of all our calamities, and at this moment the prime mover and great master-spring of all the wickedness and all the misery that now overwhelm the world.

To this account great objections have been made, and no small pains taken to confute, to expose, and to ridicule it. But after all the wit and buffoonery which have been lavished upon it, it may safely be affirmed, and might easily be shown, that it stands on firmer ground, and is encumbered with fewer difficulties, than any other hypothesis that has been yet proposed.

But still, as I have already observed, there remains another very important question to be answered. Why

is the wickedness of man, from whatever source it springs, suffered to pass unobserved and unpunished by the Judge of all the earth? Why is not the bold offender stopped short in his career of vice and iniquity? Why is he permitted to go on triumphantly, without any obstacle to his wishes, to insult, oppress, and harass the virtuous and the good, without the least check or controul, and, as it were, to brave the vengeance of the Almighty, and set at nought the great Governor of the world? Why, in short, in the language of the parable, are the tares allowed to grow up unmolested with the wheat, to choke its vigour, and impede its growth? Why are they not plucked up instantly with an indignant hand, and thrown to the dunghill, or committed to the flames?

This has been a most grievous “stumbling stone, a rock of offence,” not only to the unthinking crowd, but to men of serious thought and reflection in every age; and scarce any thing has more perplexed and disturbed the minds of the good, or given more encouragement and audacity to the bad, than the little notice that seems to be taken of the most enormous crimes, and the little distinction that is apparently made between “the wheat and the tares, between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not.”

The reflections which these mysterious proceedings are apt to excite even in the best and humblest of men, are most inimitably expressed by the royal Psalmist in the 73d Psalm; where you see all the different turns and workings of his mind laid open without disguise; and all the various ideas and sentiments that successively took possession of his soul in the progress of

his inquiry, described in the most natural and affecting manner. "Truly, (says he, with that piety which constantly inspires him,) God is loving to Israel; even unto such as are of a clean heart: nevertheless my feet were almost gone; my treadings had well nigh slipped. And why? I was grieved at the wicked; I do also see the ungodly in such prosperity. For they are in no peril of death, but are lusty and strong. They come in no misfortune like other folk: neither are they plagued like other men. And this is the cause, that they are so holden with pride, and overwhelmed with cruelty. Their eyes swell with fatness, and they do even what they lust. They corrupt other, and speak of wicked blasphemy; their talking is against the Most High. Tush, say they, how should God perceive it; is there knowledge in the Most High? Lo, these are the ungodly. These prosper in the world, and these have riches in possession. And I said, then I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency."

Sentiments such as these, are, I believe, what many good men have found occasionally rising in their minds, on observing the prosperity of the worthless part of mankind. But never were they before so beautifully and so feelingly expressed as in this passage. These complaints, however, soon pass away with men of pious dispositions, and end in meek submission to the will of Heaven. But not so with the wicked and profane. By them the forbearance of Heaven towards sinners is sometimes perverted to the very worst purposes, and made use of as an argument to encourage and confirm them in the career of vice. This effect is well and accurately described in the book of Ecclesiastes; "because sentence against an evil work is not

executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men are fully set in them to do evil*.”

It was to obviate these fatal consequences, as well as to give support and consolation to the good, that our Lord delivered this parable of the tares and the wheat; which will enable us to solve the arduous question above-mentioned, arising from the impunity and prosperity of the wicked, and to vindicate in this instance the ways of God to man.

But before I begin to state and explain the reasons of that forbearance and lenity towards sinners, which is so much objected to in the divine administration of the world, I must take notice of one very material circumstance in the case, which is, that the evil complained of is greatly magnified, and represented to be much more generally prevalent than it really is. The fact is, that although punishment does not *always* overtake the wicked in this life, yet it falls upon them more frequently and heavily than we are aware of. They are often punished when we do not observe it; but they are also sometimes punished in the most public and conspicuous manner.

The very first offence committed by man after the creation of the world was, as we know to our cost, followed by immediate and exemplary punishment. The next great criminal, Cain, was rendered a fugitive and a vagabond upon earth, and held up as an object of execration and abhorrence to mankind. When the whole earth was sunk in wickedness, it was overwhelmed by a deluge. The abominations of Sodom and Gomorrah were avenged by fire from heaven. The tyrant Pharaoh and his host were drowned in the Red Sea. Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and their

* Eccles. viii. 11.

rebellious companions, were buried alive in the bowels of the earth. It was for their portentous wickedness and savage practices that the Canaanite nations were exterminated by the Israelites; and it was for their idolatries, their licentiousness, and their rebellions against God, that the Israelites themselves were repeatedly driven into exile, reduced to slavery, and at length their city, their temple, and their whole civil polity, utterly destroyed, and themselves scattered and dispersed over every part of the known world, and every where treated with derision and contempt. It will be said, perhaps, that these were the consequences of the peculiar theocratic form of their government, under which the rewards and the punishments were temporal and immediate, and that they are not to be expected in the present state of human affairs. Still however they are proofs, and tremendous proofs, that God is not an inattentive and unconcerned spectator of human wickedness. But let us come to our own times, and to the fates and fortunes of individuals under our observation. Do we not continually see that they who indulge their passions without controul, and give an unbounded loose to every corrupt propensity of their hearts, are sooner or later the victims of their own intemperance and licentiousness? Do they not madly sacrifice to the love of pleasure, and frequently within a very short space of time, their health, their fortune, their characters, their peace of mind, and that too completely and effectually, and beyond all hopes of recovery? The instances of this are many and dreadful, without taking into the account such flagrant crimes as deliver men over into the hands of public justice. Now what is all this but the sentence of God

speedily executed against evil works? It may be alleged, that these are only the natural consequences of wrong conduct, and not the immediate judicial inflictions of Heaven. But who is it that has made these evils the natural consequences of vice? who but the great Author of nature? He hath purposely formed his world and his creature man in such a manner, that these penalties shall follow close upon wickedness, as a *present* mark of his abhorrence and detestation of it; and they fall on many offenders, both so speedily and so heavily, that till second thoughts correct the first impression, it seems almost an impeachment of his goodness that he inflicts them.

Still it must be confessed that wickedness is sometimes triumphant; and so also does folly sometimes meet with success in the world; but it is true, notwithstanding, that it labours under great disadvantages, and immoral conduct under still greater. The *natural* tendency of sin is to misery. Accidents may now and then prevent this, but not generally; art and cunning may evade it, but not nearly so often as men imagine.

But supposing the guilty to escape for a time all sufferings, and, in consequence of it, to please themselves highly with the prudence of their choice; yet still punishment, though slow, may overtake them at last. The blindness of such men to consequences is quite astonishing. One man evades the penalties of human laws in a few instances, and therefore concludes he shall never be overtaken by them. Another preserves his reputation for a time, and thence imagines it to be perfectly secure. A third finds his health hold out a few years, and therefore has not the least suspicion that what he is always undermining must fall at last.

Now each of these may, if he pleases, applaud his own wisdom ; but every one else must see his extreme stupidity and folly. In fact, whoever commits sin has swallowed poison, which from that moment begins to operate ; at first perhaps by a pleasing intoxication, afterwards by slow and uncertain degrees, but still the disease is within, and is mortal ; and, since it may every instant break out with fatal violence, it is a melancholy thing to see the person infected filled with a mad joy, which must end in heaviness and death.

Vice, especially of some sorts, affects to wear a smiling countenance, and the days that are spent in it pass along for a time pleasantly enough ; but little do the poor wretches that are deluded by it reflect what bitterness they are treasuring up for the rest of life, and how soon they may come to taste it in such consequences, as even the completest reformation, and the strictest care afterwards, will very imperfectly either prevent or cure.

After all, however, it must be acknowledged, that there are numbers of worthless and profligate men, who go on for a considerable length of time, perhaps even to the end of their days, in a full tide of worldly prosperity, blessed with every thing that is thought most valuable in this life, wealth, power, rank, health, and strength, and enjoying all these advantages without interruption and alloy, “ coming in no misfortune like other folk, and not plagued or afflicted like other men.”

These, it must be confessed, are strong symptoms of happiness, if we are to judge from appearances only. But does not every one know that happiness depends infinitely less upon external circumstances than on the internal comfort, content, and satisfaction of the mind ?

May I not appeal to every one here present, whether some of the acutest sufferings, and the most exquisite joys he has experienced, are not those which are confined to his own breast, which he enjoys in secrecy and in silence, in his retired and private moments, unobserved by the world, and independent of all exterior show? “The heart only (says the wise man most truly) knoweth its own bitterness; and a stranger doth not intermeddle with its joy*.” This then is the standard by which you must measure human happiness. You must not too hastily conclude that prosperity is felicity. In order to know whether these men are truly what they seem to be, you must follow them into their retirements, into their closets, and their couches; and if you could then see the interior of their hearts, you would probably find them objects rather of pity than of envy. Whatever they may pretend, or whatever air of cheerfulness they may assume, it is utterly impossible that they, whose sole object is to gratify their passions without the least regard to the feelings of others; who are corrupting all around them by their conversation and their example, or spreading ruin, misery, and desolation over the world by their inordinate ambition; who not only live in a constant violation of the commands of their maker, but perhaps even deny his existence, renounce his authority, and treat every thing serious and religious with derision and contempt: it is, I say, utterly impossible that these men, whatever external magnificence or gaiety may surround them, can enjoy that peace and comfort, and content of mind, which alone constitutes real and substantial happiness, and without which every thing else is insipid and unsatisfactory. A secret consciousness

* Prov. xiv. 10.

that they are acting wrong, that they are degrading and debasing their nature, and wasting their time, in mean, unworthy, and mischievous pursuits; frequent pangs of remorse for the irreparable injuries they have done to those whom they have betrayed or oppressed, and whose peace and comfort they have for ever destroyed; a dread of that Almighty Being whom they have resisted and insulted; a fear of death, and an apprehension of that punishment hereafter, which, though they affect to disbelieve and despise, they cannot help knowing to be possible, and feeling that they deserve; all these reflections, which, in spite of their utmost efforts to stifle them, will very often force themselves upon their minds, are sufficient to counteract every other advantage they possess, and to embitter every enjoyment of their lives. All shall look outwardly gay and happy, and all within shall be joyless and gloomy. They shall seem to have every thing they wish, and, in fact, have nothing that affords them any genuine satisfaction, or preserves them from the internal wretchedness that perpetually haunts them. "God (as the Psalmist expresses it) gives them their hearts' desire, and sends *leanness* withal into their souls*;" that is, a total incapacity of deriving any true comfort from the blessings they possess.

I am not here drawing imaginary pictures of misery, or describing situations, which have never existed; I could refer you to well-known examples, which would amply confirm the truth of my assertions, and would clearly show that the prosperity of the wicked is no proof of their happiness: that external calamities and corporeal pains, acute sufferings, disease, or death, are not the only instruments of vengeance which the

* Psalm cvi. 15.

Almighty has in his hand for the correction of sinners ; but that he has other engines of punishment far more terrible than these ; that he can plant daggers in the breast of the most triumphant libertine ; and that even when their worldly blessings are exalted, his secret dart can pierce their souls, and wring them with tortures sharper than a two-edged sword, yet invisible to every mortal eye*.

It appears, therefore, that sinners are in fact much oftener and much more severely punished than we are aware ; that God is even now exercising a moral government over the world ; that he is filling them with the fruits of their own devices, and chastening them in a variety of ways, not always discernible by us ; admonishing some by gentle corrections to sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto them ; but crushing some by severer strokes, “ that others may hear and fear, and do no more any such wickedness †.”

Still however it must be owned, that punishment does not always overtake the offender either speedily or immediately ; and therefore I proceed to show, that when this is the case, there are sufficient reasons for the delay.

It is obvious that every scheme which comprehends a great variety of intentions and views, cannot permit all of them to be accomplished at once, but some things, by no means to be omitted entirely, must however be postponed. Now such a complicated system is that of the government of the world, in which God may have many designs altogether unknown

▪ “ As malefactors, when they go to punishment, carry their own cross ; so wickedness generally carries its own torment along with it, and is a most skilful artificer of its own misery, filling the mind with terror, remorse, and the most agonizing reflection.” Plut. ed. Nyland, v. 2. p. 554. A.

† Deut. xiii. 11.

to us; and of those which we know best, we are far from being judges which it is right for him to prefer, whenever they happen to interfere *. Offenders, whom *we* are impatient to see punished as they deserve, he may see it expedient, for various reasons, to spare. One of these reasons is given in the parable before us. When the servants of the householder represented to him that there was a great number of tares intermixed and growing up with the wheat, and asked whether they should not go and root them up; his answer was, *Nay*; lest, while ye gather up the tares, ye root up the wheat also with them. The meaning is, that, in the present imperfect scene of things, the virtuous and the wicked are so intermingled and so connected with each other, that it is frequently impossible to punish the guilty without involving the innocent in their sufferings. In the case of sinful nations, or any large bodies of men, this is very apparent. It may happen, that a very considerable part of a great community may be guilty of the most enormous crimes of oppression, injustice, ambition, cruelty, murder, and impiety, and we are apt to call out for immediate and exemplary vengeance on such wretches as these. But if this vengeance was to be executed in all its extent, if this people was to be extirpated by fire and sword, or to be destroyed by famine, by pestilence, or earthquake, it is evident that great numbers of innocent persons must perish in this general wreck, and that the wheat would be rooted up with the tares. Instead therefore of censuring the dispensations of the

* It is as absurd for us to blame the gods for not punishing the wicked at the time and in the manner which we think the fittest, as it would be for an ignorant clown to censure a physician for not administering the most efficacious medicines to his patient at those times which he, the said clown, judges to be the most proper." Plut. v. 2. p. 549. F.

Almighty in these instances, we ought to praise and adore him for exercising his mercy when we should have no compassion, and for sparing the wicked lest he should destroy the righteous.

But though this reasoning may be allowed in the case of guilty nations, yet it may be thought not to hold good with respect to individuals. It may be alledged, that single offenders at least may be cut off, without doing any injury to the innocent or the virtuous. But is this a fact which can at all times be safely assumed? Is the criminal, whom you wish to see chastised, a perfectly unconnected, solitary, and isolated being? Has he no wife or children, no relations, no dependents, no persons of any description, that look up to him for protection, support, or assistance? If he has, are you sure that all these persons are as worthless and as deserving of correction as himself? May they not, on the contrary, be as eminent in virtue as he is in wickedness; or at the least, may they not be exempt from many of those flagrant sins that call for immediate and exemplary punishment? If so, would you have these innocent, and perhaps excellent persons, involved in the ruin of the great delinquent, on whom they entirely depend? Would you have the righteous Governor of the universe make no distinction in the infliction of his punishments? Should we not rather adopt the pathetic language of Abraham, when he is pleading with the Almighty for Sodom and Gomorrah? “Wilt thou slay the righteous with the wicked? That be far from thee. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right*?” You see then that there may be the best and most substantial reasons for delaying the punishment of the wicked,

* Gen. xviii. 25.

both with respect to nations, and individuals; and that when *we* are rashly calling out for immediate vengeance, the Judge of all the earth is full of tenderness and pity, and sees the best reasons for respiting even the most notorious offenders.

But besides this, there are other reasons for God's forbearance towards sinners. They are sometimes, as the prophet expresses it, *the rod of his anger* *. He makes use of them as instruments to chastise each other, or to correct the faults of those who are much better than themselves. And it frequently happens that their punishment is only delayed, till they have completely finished the work for which they were raised up, and that then they are made to justify the dispensations of the Almighty by the awful spectacle of a conspicuous and terrifying fall.

To instance only the case of one notorious offender. That miscreant, Judas Iscariot, long before he betrayed his Master, gave proofs of a most depraved and corrupt disposition. He was intrusted with the little stock that belonged in common to our Lord and the apostles; he kept the bag, and he robbed it. This flagrant breach of trust certainly deserved the severest punishment; and no doubt the disciples secretly murmured in their hearts, and condemned their divine Master for too great lenity towards so vile a wretch. But they knew not what *he* knew, that he was reserved for an important, though nefarious purpose, and was to be the instrument of betraying the Saviour of the world into the hands of his murderers; a deed for which his former crimes showed him to be perfectly well qualified. When this work of darkness was done, his doom was sealed, his punishment instantly followed;

* Isaiah x. 5.

and, what increased its bitterness, it was inflicted with his own hand.

There is still another very important consideration, which may frequently occasion a delay in punishing even grievous offenders; and that is, the goodness and long-suffering of God, who is not willing that any should perish, but that all should have time for repentance.

He who looks into the hearts of men, may see various reasons for sparing those whom we would consign to immediate destruction. He may discern some good qualities in them which are unknown to us, some good dispositions and good principles, which have entirely escaped our observation. He may perceive that they have been betrayed into the crimes they have committed, more by unfortunate circumstances, by error of judgement, by mistaken zeal, by wrong education, by the solicitation and the influence of worthless companions, than by an incurable and inveterate depravity of heart. He may see, that amidst a multitude of vile weeds, there are still some seeds of virtue remaining in their breasts, which, if duly cherished and fostered, and cultivated with care and tenderness, may produce most valuable fruits of righteousness. “He is unwilling therefore to break the bruised reed, or to quench the smoking flax*.” He is unwilling to destroy what may still possibly be restored; he is unwilling to extinguish, by severity, the faintest sparks of latent goodness. He sees, in short, that if they have time for reflection, if they have space for repentance, they *will* repent, and he graciously gives them a respite for that purpose †.

* Matt. xii. 20.

† “Those offenders whom the Deity knows to be absolutely incurable, he

And shall we repine or murmur at this forbearance, this indulgence of God towards sinners? Are not we ourselves all of us sinners, miserable sinners: and do we think that God treats *us* with too much indulgence? Is there any one here present who would be content that God should immediately, and without mercy, inflict on him the utmost punishment which his sins justly deserve? What, alas! would become of the very best of us, if this was the case; and who could abide these judgements of the Lord? And how then can we refuse to others that mercy of which we stand so much in need ourselves?

It is evident, and we see it every day, that men who once were profligate have in time become eminently virtuous: and what pity would it have been if extreme or untimely severity had either suddenly cut them off, or hardened them in their wickedness! Great minds are sometimes apt to fly out into excesses at their first outset, but afterwards, upon reflection, and with proper culture, rise up to the practice of the noblest virtues. And it is mercy worthy of God to exercise, and which men instead of censuring ought to admire and adore, if he chooses the milder, though slower methods, with those who are capable of being reformed by them. These sentiments cannot be better illus-

destroys; but to those in whom he discovers some good dispositions, and a probability of reformation, he gives time for amendment. Thus by immediate punishment he corrects a *few*, but by sometimes delaying it he recovers and reforms *many*." Plut. v. 2. p. 551. C. D.

To this may be added another fine observation of the same author; that God is sometimes slow in punishing the wicked, in order to teach us mortals a lesson of moderation; to repress that vehemence and precipitation with which we are sometimes impelled to avenge ourselves on those that offend us in the first heat of our passion immediately and immoderately; and to induce us to imitate that mildness, patience, and forbearance, which HE is often so merciful as to exercise towards those that have incurred his displeasure." P. 550. F.

trated than by the example of St. Paul. That illustrious apostle was we know once, as he himself confesses, *the chief of sinners*; he was a fiery zealot, and a furious persecutor of the first Christians, breathing out continually threatening and slaughter against them, making havoc of the Church, entering into every house, and haling men and women to prison; and being, as he expresses it, exceedingly mad against them, he persecuted them unto strange cities, and when they were put to death, he gave his voice against them. In the eye of the Christian world then at that time, he must have been considered as one of the fittest objects of divine vengeance, as a persecutor and a murderer, who ought to be cut off in an instant from the face of the earth.

But the great Discerner of Hearts thought otherwise. He saw that all this cruelty, great as it undoubtedly was, arose, not from a disposition naturally savage and ferocious, but from ignorance, from early religious prejudices, from misguided zeal, from a firm persuasion that by these acts of severity against the first Christians he was doing God service. He saw that this same fervour of mind, this excess of zeal, properly informed and properly directed, would make him a most active and able advocate of that very cause which he had so violently opposed. Instead therefore of an extraordinary act of power to destroy him, he visibly interposed to save him. He was in a miraculous manner converted to the Christian faith, and became the principal instrument of diffusing it through the world. We see then what baneful effects would sometimes arise from the immediate punishment even of notorious delinquents. It would in this case have deprived the Christian world of the abilities, the

eloquence, the indefatigable and successful exertions of this learned and intrepid apostle, whose conversion gave a strong additional evidence to the truth of the gospel, and who laid down his life for the religion he had embraced.

Yet notwithstanding all the reasons for sometimes delaying the punishment of guilt in the present world, it cannot be denied that there are some instances of prosperous wickedness, which cannot well be accounted for by any of them; and therefore, for a complete vindication of the moral government of God, we must have recourse to the concluding part of the parable, which will give us the fullest satisfaction on this interesting subject. To the question of the servants, whether they should gather up the tares from the midst of the wheat, the householder answers, “Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up the wheat also. Let both grow together until the harvest, and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn.” The harvest, our Lord tells us in his explanation, is the end of the world, at which awful period the Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall “gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear*.”

Here then is the great master-key to the whole of this mysterious dispensation of Heaven. God, we see, has appointed a day when every deficiency in his

* Matt. xiii. 41, 42, 43.

administration shall be supplied, and every seeming disproportion and inequality shall be rectified*.

Even in this world it appears that wickedness is punished in some measure, and to a certain degree: and we have seen that the interests of virtue itself, among other considerations, require that it should not be instantly punished to the full extent of its deserts. God is perpetually showing, even in the present life, his different regard to right and wrong, by every such method as the constitution of the world which he has created admits; and therefore no sooner shall that world come to an end, and all obstacles to an equal administration of justice be taken out of the way, than he shall come to execute righteous judgement upon earth.

“He is not slack as men count slackness †,” that is, negligent and remiss; he only waits for the proper season of doing all that hitherto remains undone. Human weakness, indeed, by a small delay of punishing, may lose the power of doing it for ever. “But in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength ‡.” Human inconstancy may be vehement and passionate at first; then negligent and languid. The sense of an unworthy action that does not injure us, quickly wears out of our mind; and if we take no immediate notice of it, we shall possibly take none at all. But we must not

* “As the soul survives the dissolution of the body, (says the excellent Plutarch) and exists after death, it is most probable that it will receive rewards and punishments in a future state; for it goes through a kind of contest during the present life, and when that is over, it will have its due recompence hereafter.” . 561. A.

How nearly does this approach to the doctrine of the gospel, which had been promulgated near one hundred years before Plutarch wrote. But thanks be to God, what this great man thought only probable, we have the happiness of knowing to be certain.

† 2 Pet. iii. 9.

‡ Isaiah xxvi. 4.

think God to be such a one as ourselves. Eternity itself will make no change in *his* abhorrence of wickedness, nor will any thing either transport him to act before his appointed time, or prevail upon him to give a respite when that time comes. The sinners of the antediluvian world, abusing the long space of one hundred and twenty years which he allowed for their repentance, perished at the end of it without mercy. The angels who fell from their first estate before this earth was created, he has reserved for torments, that shall not finally take place till it is consumed*.

The same important period his infinite wisdom has marked out for the final judgement of men. And undoubtedly it *may* produce advantages of unspeakable moment thus to defer justice, with a design of rendering some chosen parts of duration memorable throughout the universe, by a more extensive and illustrious exercise of it. For it must needs make an inconceivably strong and lasting impression upon every order of beings that shall then be present at the solemn scene, to hear the final doom of a whole world pronounced at once; and to behold sins that had been committed thousands of years before, punished with the same attention to every circumstance as if they had been but of yesterday.

How far off these judgements of the Lord may be, we none of us know. But with regard to ourselves, they are near, they are even at the door. The few days we have to pass in this transient scene will determine our condition for ever, and bring us into an eternal state, compared with which the continuance of the present frame of nature, from its very beginning, will be as nothing. Then every act of the government

* Jude 6. 2 Pet. ii. 4.

of God will be seen in its true light; the imagined length of distance between guilt and its punishment will totally disappear; and offenders will lament in vain that sentence is executed so *speedily* as it is against evil works. But with peculiar severity will it be executed on them, who, despising the riches of that goodness which would lead them to repentance, “treasure up for themselves wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgement of God*.”

Upon the whole then let not either the sinner triumph, or the virtuous repine, at the apparent impunity or even prosperity of the wicked in the present life. To the audacious sinner we apply those most apposite and most awful words of the son of Sirach: “Say not, who shall control me for my works? for the Lord will surely avenge thy pride. Say not, I have sinned, and what harm hath happened unto me? for the Lord is indeed long-suffering, but he will in no wise let thee go. Say not, his mercy is great, he will be pacified for the multitude of my sins; for both mercy and wrath come from him, and his indignation resteth upon sinners. Make therefore no tarrying to turn unto the Lord, and put not off from day to day; for suddenly shall the wrath of the Lord come forth, and in thy security shalt thou be destroyed, and perish in the day of vengeance†.”

To the religious and virtuous on the other hand we say, “Fret not thyself because of the ungodly, neither be thou envious against the evil doers. Hold thee still in the Lord, and abide patiently upon him; but grieve not thyself at him whose way doth prosper, against the man that doeth after evil counsels. Wicked doers

* Rom. ii. 5.

† Eccles. v. 3—7.

shall be rooted out ; and they that patiently abide the Lord, those shall inherit the land*.” “ Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and the latter rain. Be ye also patient ; for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh †.”

It is not indeed always an easy task to exercise this patience, when we see conspicuous instances either of individuals or of nations, notorious for their profligacy, triumphant and prosperous in all their ways. We can scarce repress our discontent, or forbear joining with the prophet in his expostulation with the Almighty, “ Righteous art thou, O Lord ! yet let me talk with thee of thy judgements : Why do the ways of the wicked prosper ? Why are they all happy that deal very treacherously ‡ ? To this we can now answer in the words of Job : “ Knowest thou not this, since man was placed upon earth, that the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment ? Though his excellency mount unto the heavens, and his head reach unto the clouds ; yet he shall perish for ever, and they that have seen him shall say, Where is he § ? ”

In fact it has been proved, in the course of this inquiry, that in such an immense and complicated system as that of the universe, there are many reasons which we can discern, and a thousand others perhaps totally unknown to us, which render it necessary that the virtuous should suffer a temporary depression, and the wicked enjoy a temporary triumph. But let not these apparent irregularities dispirit or discourage us :

* Psalm xxxvii. 7—9.

† Jerem. xii. 1.

‡ James v. 7, 8.

§ Job xx. 5, 6, 7.

for whenever the purposes of Providence in these mysterious dispensations shall have been accomplished, every disorder shall be rectified, and every appearance of injustice done away. The time and the season for doing this, God has reserved in his own power: and we must not presume to prescribe rules to the wisdom of the Almighty. To men excruciated with pain, every moment seems an age; and to men groaning under oppression, their deliverance, if it come not instantly, may seem extremely distant. But let them not despair: in due season they shall reap, if they faint not. At the period marked out by infinite wisdom, and which it is their duty to await with patience, God shall cause his judgement to be heard from heaven, and the earth shall tremble and be still. He shall then demonstrate to the whole world “that his hand is not shortened that it cannot redeem, and that he still retains the power to save*.” He shall prove, in a manner the most awful and most satisfactorily, “that verily there is a reward for the righteous, and a punishment for the wicked; that doubtless there is a God that judgeth the earth†.”

* Isaiah, chaps. i. & ii.

† Psalm lviii. 11.

LECTURE XIV.

MATTHEW XIV.

WE are now, in the course of these Lectures, arrived at the fourteenth chapter of St. Matthew, which begins in the following manner :

“ At that time Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus, and he said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist : he is risen from the dead, and therefore mighty works do show forth themselves in him. For Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put him in prison for Herodias’ sake, his brother Philip’s wife : for John said unto him, It is not lawful for thee to have her. And when he would have put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet. But when Herod’s birth-day was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod : whereupon he promised with an oath, that he would give her whatsoever she would ask ; and she, being before instructed of her mother, said, Give me here John Baptist’s head in a charger. And the king was sorry ; nevertheless for the oath’s sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her, and he sent, and beheaded John in the prison ; and his head was brought in a charger,

and given to the damsel ; and she brought it to her mother. And his disciples came, and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus.”

Before we enter upon this remarkable and affecting narrative of the murder of John the Baptist by Herod, it will be proper to take notice of the two first verses of this chapter, which gave occasion to the introduction of that transaction in this place, although it had happened some time before.

“ At that time, says the Evangelist, Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus, and he said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist : he is risen from the dead, and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him.”

It is not easy to meet with a more striking instance than this of the force of conscience over a guilty mind, or a stronger proof how perpetually it goads the sinner, not only with well-grounded fears and apprehensions of impending punishment and vengeance, but with imaginary terrors and visionary dangers.

No sooner did the fame of Jesus reach the ears of the tyrant Herod, than it immediately occurred to his mind that he had himself, not long before, most cruelly and wantonly put to death an innocent, virtuous, and holy man, whose reputation for wisdom, integrity, and sanctity of manners, stood almost as high in the estimation of the world as that of Jesus ; and who had even declared himself the herald and the forerunner of that extraordinary person. This instantly suggested to him an idea the most extravagant that could be imagined, that this very person who assumed the name of Jesus was in fact no other than John the Baptist himself, whom he had beheaded, and who was now risen from the dead, and was endowed with the power

of working miracles, though he never performed any when living.

It is evident that nothing could be more improbable and absurd than these suppositions, nothing more contrary even to his own principles; for there is reason to believe that Herod, like most other people of high rank at that time, was of the sect called the Sadducees, a sect which rejected the immortality of the soul, and the doctrine of a resurrection, and must therefore be perfectly adverse to the strange imagination of John the Baptist being risen from the dead. Yet the fears of Herod overruled all the prejudices of his sect, and raised up before his eyes the semblance of the murdered Baptist armed with the power of miracles, for the very purpose (he perhaps imagined) of inflicting exemplary vengeance upon him for that atrocious deed, as well as for his adultery, his incest, and all his other crimes; which now probably presented themselves in their most hideous forms to his terrified imagination, pursued him into his most secret retirements, and tortured his breast with unceasing agonies.

The evangelist having thus introduced the mention of John the Baptist, goes back a little in his narrative, to make the reader acquainted with that part of the Baptist's history which brought down upon him the indignation of Herod, and was the occasion of his death.

This flagitious prince had, it seems, in the face of day, and in defiance of all laws, human and divine, committed the complicated crime of adultery and incest, attended with every circumstance that could mark an abandoned and unprincipled mind.

He had been married a considerable time to the

daughter of Aretas, king of Arabia Petræa, but conceiving a violent passion for his brother Philip's wife, Herodias, he first seduced her affections from her husband, then dismissed his own wife, and married Herodias, during the life-time of his brother. It was impossible that such portentous wickedness as this could escape the observation or the reproof of the holy Baptist. He had the honesty and the courage to reproach the tyrant with the enormity of his guilt, although he could not be ignorant of the danger he incurred by such a measure; but he determined to do his duty, and to take the consequences. The consequences were, "that Herod laid hold of John, and bound him, and threw him into prison*." And undoubtedly his wish was to have put him immediately to death, but he was restrained by two considerations. The first was, because John was held in such high esteem and veneration by all the people, that had any violence been offered to him by Herod, he was apprehensive that it might have occasioned a general insurrection against his government; for we are informed by St. Matthew, that "he feared the multitude, because they counted John as a prophet†."

The other reason was, that although he felt the utmost indignation and resentment against John for the freedom he had used in reproaching him for his licentious conduct, yet at the same time the character of that excellent man, his piety, his sanctity, his integrity, his disinterestedness, nay, even the courage which had so much offended and provoked him, commanded his respect and veneration, and excited his fears; for we are told expressly that *Herod feared John*, knowing he was a just man and an holy‡. Nor is this all, he not

* Matt. xiv. 3.

† Matt. xiv. 5.

‡ Mark vi. 20.

only feared John, but in some degree paid court to him. He frequently sent for him out of prison, and conversed with him, and, as the evangelist expresses it, *observed* him ; that is, listened to him with attention and with pleasure ; nay, he went farther still, *he did many things*, many things which John exhorted and enjoined him to do*. He perhaps showed more attention to many of his public duties, more gentleness to his subjects, more compassion to the poor, more equity in his judicial determinations, more regard to public worship ; and vainly hoped, perhaps, like many other audacious sinners, that this partial reformation, this half-way amendment, would avert the judgements with which John probably threatened him. But the *main* point, the great object of John's reprehension, the incestuous adultery in which he lived, *that* he could not part with ; it was too precious, too favourite a sin to give up ; too great a sacrifice to make to conscience and to God.

What a picture does this hold out to us of that strange thing called human nature, of that inconsistency, that contradiction, that contrariety, which sometimes take place in the heart of man, unsanctified and unsubdued by the power of divine grace ! and what an exalted idea at the same time, does it give us of the dignity of a truly religious character, like that of John, which compels even its bitterest enemies to reverence and to fear it ; and forces even the most profligate and most powerful of men to pay an unwilling homage to excellence, at the very moment, perhaps, when they are meditating its destruction !

In this state of irresolution Herod might probably have continued, and the fate of John have remained

* Mark vi. 20.

undecided for a considerable time, had not an incident taken place, which determined both much sooner perhaps than was intended. Herod, on his birth-day, gave an entertainment to the principal officers of his army and of his court; and as a peculiar and very uncommon compliment on the occasion, Salome, the daughter of his wife Herodias by her former husband, came in and danced before the company in a manner so pleasing to Herod and to all his guests, that the king, in a sudden transport of delight, cried out to the damsel, as St. Mark relates it, "Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give it thee." And he swore unto her, "Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, even unto the half of my kingdom*." The folly, the rashness, and the madness of such an oath as this, on so foolish an occasion, could be exceeded by nothing but the horrible purpose to which it was perverted by the young creature to whom it was made, or rather by her profligate instructor and adviser, her mother Herodias. Astonished and overwhelmed probably with the magnitude of such an unexpected offer, which laid at her feet half the wealth, the power, and the splendour of a kingdom, she found herself unable to decide between the various dazzling objects that would present themselves to her imagination, and therefore very naturally applies to her mother for advice and direction. Most mothers, on such an occasion, would have asked for a daughter a magnificent establishment, a situation of high rank and power! But Herodias had a passion to gratify, stronger perhaps than any other, when it takes full possession of the human heart, and that was revenge. She had been mortally injured, as she conceived, by the Baptist,

* Mark vi. 22, 23.

who had attempted to dissolve her present infamous connexion with Herod. And she not only felt the highest indignation at this insult, but was afraid that his repeated remonstrances might at length prevail. She therefore did not hesitate one moment what to ask; she gave way to all the fury of her resentment; and without the least regard to the character or the delicate situation of her inexperienced daughter, she immediately ordered her to demand the head of her detested enemy, John the Baptist! The wretched young woman unfortunately obeyed this dreadful command; and, as we are told by the evangelist, “came in straightway with haste unto the king*.” She came with speed in her steps, and eagerness in her eye, and said, “Give me here John the Baptist’s head in a charger.” This savage request appalled even the unfeeling heart of Herod himself. He did not expect it, and was not prepared for it; and although he was highly disgusted with John, yet, for the reasons above mentioned, he did not choose to go to extremities with him. He was therefore *exceeding sorry*, as the sacred historian informs us, to be thus forced upon so violent and hazardous a measure; “nevertheless for his oath’s sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given to her.” Conceiving himself, most absurdly, bound by his oath, to comply even with this inhuman demand, and afraid lest he should be reproached by those that were around him with having broken his promise, he preferred the real guilt of murder to the false imputation of perjury, and “sent and beheaded John in prison; and his head was brought in a charger, and given to the damsel, and she brought it to her mother.” It is well known that it

* Mark vi. 25. Matt. xiv. 8.

was a custom in the East, and is so still in the Turkish court, to produce the heads of those that are ordered to be put to death, as a proof that they have been really executed. But how this wretched damsel could so far subdue the common feelings of human nature, and still more the natural tenderness and delicacy of her sex, as not only to endure so disgusting and shocking a spectacle, but even to carry the bleeding trophy in triumph to her mother, it is not easy to imagine; and it would scarce be credited, did we not know that in times and in countries much nearer to our own, sights of still greater horror than this have been contemplated, even by women and children, with complacency and with delight.

Such was the conclusion of this singular transaction; and every part of it is so pregnant with useful instruction and admonition, that I shall stand excused, I hope, if I take up a little more of your time than is usual in discourses of this nature, in commenting somewhat at large on the conduct and characters of the several actors in this dreadful tragedy.

And in the first place, there can be no doubt that the most guilty and the most unpardonable of all the parties concerned in this murder of an innocent and excellent man, was the abandoned Herodias. For it was she whose indignation against John was carried to the greatest length, and in the end effected his ruin. It was she who was continually importuning and urging Herod to put the Baptist to death, from which, for a considerable time, his fears restrained him. It was she who, as St. Mark expresses it, “*had a quarrel against John, and would have killed him, but she could not**.” The words translated, *had a quarrel*

* Mark vi, 19.

against him, have in the original much greater force and energy, ἐνεῖχεν αὐτῷ. She, as it were, fastened and hung upon John, and was determined not to let go her hold till she had destroyed him*.

We here see a fatal proof of the extreme barbarities to which that most diabolical sentiment of revenge will drive the natural tenderness even of a female mind; what a close connexion there is between crimes of apparently a very different complexion, and how frequently the uncontrolled indulgence of what are called the softer affections, lead ultimately to the most violent excesses of the malignant passions. The voluptuary generally piques himself on his benevolence, his humanity, and gentleness of disposition. His claim even to these virtues is at the best very problematical; because, in his pursuit of pleasure, he makes no scruple of sacrificing the peace, the comfort, the happiness of those for whom he pretends the tenderest affection, to the gratification of his own selfish desires. But however he may preserve his good humour, when he meets with no resistance, the moment he is thwarted and opposed in his flagitious purposes, he has no hesitation in going any lengths to gain his point, and will fight his way to the object he has in view through the heart of the very best friend he has in the world. The same thing we see in a still more striking point of view, in the conduct of Herodias. She was at first only a bold unprincipled libertine, and might perhaps be admired and celebrated, as many others of that description have been, for her good temper, her sensibility, her generosity to the poor; and with this character she might

* Hesychius explains ἐνεχῆι by ἐγκειται, sticks close to in hatred or spite. Doddrige gives still greater force to the expression; but Parkhurst does not allow it.

have gone out of the world, had no such person as John arisen to reprove her and her husband for their profligacy, and to endanger the continuance of her guilty commerce. But no sooner does he rebuke them as they deserved, than Herodias showed that she had other passions to indulge besides those which had hitherto disgraced her character; and that, when she found it necessary to her pleasures, she could be as cruel as she had been licentious; could contrive and accomplish the destruction of a great and good man, could feast her eyes with the sight of his mangled head in a charger, could even make her own poor child the instrument of her vengeance, and, as I am inclined to think, a *reluctant* accomplice in a most atrocious murder.

Here is a most awful lesson held out, not only to the female sex, but to both sexes, to persons of all ages and conditions, to beware of giving way to any one evil propensity in their nature, however it may be disguised under popular names, however indulgently it may be treated by the world, however it may be authorized by the general practice of mankind; because they here see that they may not only be led into the grossest extravagancies of that individual passion, but may also be insensibly betrayed into the commission of crimes of the deepest dye, which in their serious moments they always contemplated with the utmost horror.

Let us now take our leave of this wretched woman, and turn our attention for a moment to her unhappy daughter. Here undoubtedly there is much to blame, but there is also something to pity and to lament. Her youth, her inexperience, her unfortunate situation in a

most corrupt court, the vile example that was constantly before her eyes, the influence, the authority, the commands of a profligate mother, these are circumstances that plead powerfully for compassion, and tend in some degree to mitigate her guilt. Her first fault evidently was that gross violation of all decorum, and all custom too, in appearing and dancing publicly before Herod, and a large number of his friends assembled at a festive meeting, and perhaps half intoxicated with wine. But it is not probable that a young woman of high rank, and so very tender an age as she seems to have been, should have *voluntarily* taken such a step as this, or should have been able to subdue at once all the modesty and the timidity of her sex, and acquire courage enough to encounter the eyes and the observations of so licentious an assembly. There can be little doubt, that she was wrought upon by the persuasions of her artful mother, who flattered herself that this artifice might produce some such effect in the mind of Herod as actually followed. What adds great weight to this conjecture is, that her next dreadful transgression, her singular and sanguinary request to have the head of John the Baptist presented to her, was unquestionably the suggestion of the abandoned Herodias.

The sacred historian expressly informs us, that it was in consequence of being *before instructed* of her mother, that she made this demand. Nor is this all; there is great reason to believe that it was with the utmost difficulty she was prevailed on to comply with the injunctions that were given her; for the original words *προβιβασθεισα υπο της μητρος*; which we translate *before instructed of her mother*, more strictly signify

being *wrought upon, instigated, and impelled* by her mother; for this is the sense in which that expression is used by the best Greek writers.

This supposition receives no small confirmation from the manner in which she is represented by the evangelist as delivering her answer to Herod. "She came straightway with haste unto the king;" she betrayed on her return the utmost emotion and agitation of mind. She had worked herself up to a resolution of obeying her mother; and was in haste to execute her commission, lest, if any pause had intervened, her heart should relent, her spirits fail her, and she should not have courage to utter the dreadful demand she had to make.

All this seems to imply great reluctance on her part, and is evidently a considerable alleviation of her crime; yet does by no means exempt her from all guilt. For although obedience to parents is a very sacred duty, yet there is another duty superior to it, that which we owe to our Maker. And whenever even a parent would incite us to any thing plainly repugnant to his laws, as was the case in the present instance, we must, though with all possible decency and respect, yet with firmness and with courage, resist the impious command, and declare it to be our decided resolution "to obey God rather than man."

The next person that claims our notice in this interesting narrative is Herod himself. We have already seen his inconsistent and undecided conduct respecting John. He had in a moment of exasperation thrown him into prison; but from a respect to his character, and fear of the consequences if he offered him any further violence, he suffered him to remain unmolested, and even frequently admitted him to his

presence, and held conversations with him. And it is not improbable that after some time his resentment might have subsided, and he might have released his prisoner. But when once a man has involved himself deeply in guilt, he has no safe ground to stand upon. Every thing is unsound and rotten under his feet. He cannot say, “ So far will I go in wickedness, and no farther.” The crimes he has already committed may have an unseen connexion with others, of which he has not the slightest suspicion; and he may be hurried, when he least intends it, into enormities, of which he once thought himself utterly incapable. This was the case in the present instance. When Herod first engaged in his guilty intercourse with Herodias, he probably meant to go no farther. He meant to content himself with adultery and incest, and had no intention of adding murder to the black catalogue of his crimes. He had no other view but the gratification of a present passion, and did not look forward to the many evils which scarce ever fail to arise from a criminal connexion with a profligate and artful woman. This was the original and fruitful source of all his future crimes, and future misfortunes. He flattered himself that, notwithstanding his marriage with Herodias, he should still be master of his own resolutions and his own actions. But Herodias soon taught him a different lesson. She showed that she understood him much better than he did himself. She convinced him that his destiny was in her hands; that she held the secret wire that governed all his motions; and that she could, by one means or other, bend his mind to any purpose which she was determined to accomplish. It was *his* intention to save John the Baptist. It was *her* intention to destroy him, and she did it. He had,

indeed, the courage to resist her repeated solicitations that he would put John to death; and he piqued himself probably on the firmness of his resolution. But Herodias was not of a temper to be discouraged by a few denials or repulses. She knew that there were other more effectual ways of carrying her point. If the king could not be compelled to surrender by assault, he might be taken by stratagem and surprise. And to this she had recourse. She saw that her daughter had attractions and accomplishments which might be turned to good account, which might be made to operate most powerfully on such a mind as Herod's.

She, therefore, as we have already seen, planned the project of her dancing before him on the festival of his birth-day, in the hope that in the unguarded moments of convivial mirth, he might be betrayed into some concession, some act of indulgence towards this favourite daughter, from which he could not easily recede. The plan succeeded even probably beyond her expectations. The monarch was caught in the snare that was laid for him. He made a rash promise to Salome, and confirmed that promise by an oath, that he would give her whatsoever she would ask. And when, to his infinite astonishment and grief, she demanded the life of the man whom he wished to save, instead of retreating by the only way he had left, that of retracting a promise which it was madness to make, and the extremity of wickedness to perform, he was induced by a false point of honour (as worthless men frequently are) to commit an atrocious murder rather than violate a rash oath; an oath which could never make that right which was before intrinsically wrong, which could never bind him to any thing in itself

unlawful, much less to the most unlawful of all things, the destruction of an innocent and virtuous man.

I have entered thus minutely into the detail of this remarkable transaction, because, as I have before remarked, every line of it is replete with the most important instruction; as, indeed, is the case with every part of the sacred history in the gospel, and the acts, which teach full as much by the facts they relate as by the precepts they inculcate. The moral lessons to be drawn from the passage before us, I have already pointed out in some degree as I went along; but there are one or two of a more general import, which I shall briefly add in conclusion, and which well deserve your very serious attention.

The first is, that in the conduct of life there is nothing more to be dreaded and avoided, nothing more dangerous to our peace, to our comfort, to our character, to our welfare here and hereafter, than a criminal attachment to an abandoned and unprincipled woman, more particularly in the early period of life. It has been the source of more misery, and, besides all the guilt which naturally belongs to it, has led to the commission of more and greater crimes, than perhaps any other single cause that can be named. We have seen into what a gulf of sin and suffering it plunged the wretched Herod. He began with adultery, and he ended with murder, and with the total ruin of himself, his kingdom, and all the vile partners of his guilt. The same has happened in a thousand other instances; and there are, I am persuaded, few persons here present, of any age or experience in the world, who cannot recollect numbers, both of individuals and of families, whose peace, tranquillity, comfort, characters, and fortunes, have been completely destroyed by illicit

and licentious connexions of this sort. Nor is this the worst. The present effects of these vices, dreadful as they sometimes are, cannot be compared with the misery which they are preparing for us hereafter. The scriptures every where rank these vices in the number of those *presumptuous* sins, which, in a future life, will experience the severest marks of divine displeasure. The world, indeed, treats them with more indulgence. They are excused and palliated, and even defended, on the ground of human frailty, of natural constitution, of strong passions, and invincible temptations; and they are generally considered and represented in various popular performances (especially in those imported from foreign countries) as associated with many amiable virtues, with goodness of heart, with high principles of honour, with benevolence, compassion, humanity, and generosity. But whatever gentle names may be given to sensuality and licentiousness, whatever specious apologies may be made for them, whatever wit or talents may be employed in rendering them popular and fashionable, whatever numbers, whatever examples may sanction or authorize them, it is impossible that any thing can do away their natural turpitude and deformity, or avert those punishments which the gospel has denounced against them. They are represented there as things that ought not even to be *named* among Christians, as defiling the man, as warring against the soul, as grieving the spirit of God, as rendering men incapable of inheriting the kingdom of heaven, as exposing them to the indignation of Him who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity*.

And as if men had endeavoured in those days, as well

* Ephes. v. 3. Mat. xv. 18. 1 Pet. ii. 11. 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10. Habak. i. 13.

as in our own, to soften and extenuate and explain away the guilt of licentiousness, the apostle adds, with great solemnity and great earnestness, “let no man deceive you with *vain* words; for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience*.”

Let every man then that pretends to be a Christian, and lives in the habitual practice of the vices here condemned, weigh well these tremendous words. If there be any truth in the gospel, they will not be *vain* words; nor will offences of this nature ever pass unnoticed or unpunished by the righteous Governor of the world.

These remarks are not introduced here without reason. It is the peculiar prevalence of these very vices at this moment which demands such animadversions as these; a prevalence which I infer not merely from an imaginary estimate of the low state of morals amongst us, founded on rumour, on conjecture, or misconstruction, but from facts too well ascertained, and which obtrude themselves on the notice of every observing mind †. I mean those daring violations of the nuptial contract, and the frequent divorces resulting from them, which seem daily gaining ground in this kingdom. This is a most melancholy and incontrovertible proof of increasing depravity amongst us, and I am sorry to add of depravity of the very deepest dye; for instances have not long since occurred, in which the guilt of the parties too nearly resembled that of Herod, combining the two atrocious crimes of adultery and incest! Surely such enormities as these are enough to make us tremble, and loudly call for the interposition of the legislature, lest they bring down

* Ephes. v. 6.

† In the spring of the year 1800.

upon us the just vengeance of an offended God. “Shall I not visit for these things? saith the Lord: Shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this*?”

Another reflection arising from this short history of Herod and John the Baptist is this; that although, in the ordinary course of divine administrations, the punishment of the wicked does not *always* overtake them *here*, but is reserved for the last awful day of account; yet it sometimes happens (as I observed in my last Lecture) that their crimes draw after them their just recompense, even in the present life. This was eminently the case of the flagitious Herod; for besides those terrors of conscience, which, as we have seen, perpetually haunted him, which raised up before him terrific forms and agonizing apprehensions; and represented John the Baptist as risen from the dead to avenge his crimes; we are informed by the historian Josephus, that his marriage with Herodias drew upon him the resentment of Aretas, king of Arabia Petrea, the father of his first wife, who declared war against him, and, in an engagement with Herod's army, defeated it with great slaughter. This, says the historian, the Jews considered as a just judgement of God upon Herod for his murder of John the Baptist†. And not long after this, both he and Herodias were deprived of their kingdom by the Roman emperor, and sent into perpetual banishment. And it is added by another historian‡, that their daughter Salome met with a violent and untimely death. Instances like this are intended to show that the Governor of the universe, though he has appointed a distant period for the *general* distribution of his rewards and punishments,

* Jer. v. 9.

† Jos. Ant. l. xviii. c. 5. s. 1. 2.

‡ Nicephori. Hist. Eccles. l. 11. p. 89.

yet, in extraordinary cases, he will sometimes interpose to chastise the bold offender, to assert his superintending providence and supreme dominion over all his creatures, and to give them the most awful proofs, that, from his all-searching eye, no wickedness can be concealed.

The remaining part of this chapter is occupied with the recital of two miracles, on which I have only to observe, that they have both of them a spiritual as well as a literal meaning, are both of a very extraordinary nature, and calculated to make, as they did, a most powerful impression on the minds of the spectators; these were, the feeding above five thousand persons with five loaves and two fishes, and our Saviour's walking on the sea. The first of these had a reference to that spiritual food, that celestial manna, that bread of life, which our Lord was then dispensing in such abundance to those that hungered and thirsted after righteousness. The other was meant to encourage the great principle of faith; of *trust and reliance upon God*, in opposition to that self-confidence, that high opinion of our own strength, which we are too apt to entertain, and to which St. Peter, above all the other apostles, was peculiarly liable. When therefore, in consequence of his own request, he was permitted to go to Jesus on the water, and forgetting immediately who was his guide and support, began to be afraid and to sink, and called out to his Divine Master to save him, our Lord graciously stretched forth his hand and caught him, and said unto him, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" A reproof well calculated to convince him that it was not in proportion to his own natural strength, but according to the degree of his faith, that he must rise or sink. And

what he says to Peter, he says to all who waver in their belief: "O ye of little faith, why do you doubt?"

But there is another circumstance belonging to these miracles, which is of great importance; they are very extraordinary and astonishing instances of our Lord's power over nature, and of such a kind as to admit of no possibility of being counterfeited. And accordingly we find, that although some cheats have pretended to cure diseases miraculously, and some have even attempted to raise the dead, yet no impostor I believe has ever yet been so bold as to undertake to feed five thousand people at once with five loaves and two fishes, or to walk upon the sea. And the reason is plain. It would not be very easy to persuade five thousand people that they had been plentifully fed, when in fact they had received no nourishment at all; and it would be rather too dangerous an experiment for any man, not really supported by the hand of God, to attempt walking on the sea, when he cannot but know that the loss of life must be the inevitable consequence of it. Indeed this act has always been considered as utterly beyond all human power to achieve; accordingly *two feet walking upon water* was an Ægyptian hieroglyphic to denote *impossibility*. And Job represents the power of *treading on the waves of the sea* as a distinguished mark and attribute of *the Deity**. Yet this did Jesus do; this impossibility did he accomplish: a most incontestible proof that God was with him. And in fact this miracle seems to have made a stronger impression on the minds of his disciples than any other recorded in the gospels, even than that of raising the dead; for we are told in St. Mark†, that when our Lord went up into the ship,

* Job ix. 8.

† Chap. vi.

from *walking on the sea*, the disciples were *sore amazed* in themselves *beyond measure*, and wondered. The words in the original are still stronger; indeed so strong, that it is impossible for the English language to express all their force. In comparison of this miracle, even that of the loaves and fishes seems to have appeared nothing in the eyes of the disciples; for St. Mark tells us, they considered not the miracle of the loaves, for their heart was hardened; but at the act of walking on the sea, they were *amazed beyond measure*; they were overwhelmed and overcome with this astonishing display of divine power; they fell instantly at the feet of Jesus, and worshipped him; and exclaimed, as every one who considers this stupendous miracle *must* do, “Of a truth *thou art the SON of GOD!*”

LECTURE XV.

MATTHEW XVII.

I SHALL now request your attention to a very remarkable part of our Saviour's history, that which is called by the evangelists his TRANSFIGURATION, and which is related in the seventeenth chapter of St. Matthew. It so happens, that many years ago I turned my thoughts very much to this particular subject in the sacred writings, and ventured (though without my name) to lay my sentiments concerning it before the public. I could have wished therefore to have excused myself from repeating here any part of what I have said elsewhere, and to have passed over this incident unnoticed. But when I considered that this transaction is of a very peculiar and extraordinary nature; that there are circumstances attending it which cannot fail to excite the curiosity of an inquisitive mind; that there are difficulties in it which stand in need of a solution, and conclusions to be drawn from it of considerable utility and importance; when I considered farther, that much the greatest part of this audience had probably never seen or ever heard of what I had formerly written on this subject; I determined not to omit so material a part of the task I am engaged in, but to give you what I conceive to be the true explanation of this interest-

ing event. And I now feel the less difficulty in doing this, because, upon a careful review of that interpretation, after an interval of twelve years, I am still convinced of its truth, and have had the additional satisfaction of finding it confirmed by the authority of some learned and judicious commentators, whose opinions on one or two leading principles coincide with my own; but whose observations I had not seen, (having consulted but very few expositors on the subject) when my essay went to the press.

The relation of this singular transaction is given us by three out of four evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and alluded to in the writings of the fourth. They all agree in the main points. There is no material variation, and not the least contradiction between them. But, as it is very natural, where different persons relate the same fact (and as indeed must generally happen where the story is not concerted among them) a few particulars are taken notice of by some which are passed over in silence by others. Saint Matthew's account of it is as follows :

“ And after six days, Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them; and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here : if thou wilt, let us make three tabernacles, one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and behold, a voice out of the cloud, which said, this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye him. And when the

disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. And Jesus came and touched them, and said, arise, and be not afraid. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only. And as they came down from the mount, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.

“ And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes, that Elias must first come? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias shall truly first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, that Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed: likewise also shall the Son of man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood, that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.

Such is the history which the evangelist gives us of the transfiguration; and on the very first view of it, every one must see that a transaction of so uncommon and splendid a nature could not be intended merely to surprise and amuse the disciples. There must have been some great object in view; some end to be obtained, worthy of the magnificent apparatus made use of to accomplish it.

Now there were, I conceive, (besides some collateral and subordinate designs,) two principal and important purposes, which were meant to be answered by this illustrious scene.

The first was, to set before the eyes of the disciples a *visible and figurative representation of Christ's coming in glory to judge the world, and to reward, with everlasting felicity, all his faithful servants.*

In order to prove this, and at the same to bring to the reader's view those circumstances which preceded,

and in some degree gave occasion to the celestial vision, it will be necessary to look back to the chapter immediately before that in which the transfiguration is related.

In the 21st verse of the sixteenth chapter we find, that Jesus then, for the first time, thought fit to give some intimations to his disciples of the strange and extraordinary scenes he was soon to pass through; his sufferings, his death, and his resurrection; things of which, before this declaration, they seem not to have had the smallest conception or suspicion.

“ From that time forth began Jesus to show to his disciples how that he must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day*.”

The information, so perfectly new and unexpected to the disciples, and so destructive of all the fond hopes they had hitherto indulged, overwhelmed them with astonishment and grief. And St. Peter, whose natural warmth and eagerness of temper generally led him both to feel such mortifications more sensibly, and to express his feelings more promptly and more forcibly, than any of the rest, was so shocked at what he had just heard, that “ he took Jesus, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee.” Our Saviour, who saw every thing that passed in his mind, and perceived, probably, that this expostulation took its rise more from disappointed interest and ambition than from a generous concern for his Master’s credit and honour, gave him an immediate and severe reproof: “ Get thee behind me, Satan, for thou art an offence to me; for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.”

* Matt. xvi. 21.

He then proceeded to show, not only that he himself must suffer persecution, but that all those who would at that time come after him, and share with him the arduous and dangerous task of sowing the first seeds of the gospel, “ must deny themselves, and take up their cross, and follow him.” But then, to support them under those severe injunctions, he cheers them immediately with a brighter scene of things, and with a prospect of *his* future glory, and *their* future recompense. “ The Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then shall he reward every man according to his works.” And he adds, “ Verily I say unto you, there be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.” The meaning of these last words I shall inquire into hereafter. But the evident tendency of the whole passage is to prepare the minds of his disciples for the cruel treatment which both he and they were to undergo, and at the same time to raise their drooping spirits, by setting before their eyes his own exaltation, and their glorious rewards in another life.

This discourse, however, he probably found had not sufficiently subdued their prejudices, and reconciled them to his state of humiliation; and therefore he determined to try a method of impressing them with juster sentiments, which he frequently had recourse to on similar occasions; and that was, representing to them, by a *significant action*, what he had already explained by words.

Accordingly, within a few days after the foregoing conversation, he taketh with him Peter, James, and John, and bringeth them up into a high mountain (probably Mount Tabor) apart. Very fanciful reasons

have been assigned by some of the commentators for his taking with him only three of his disciples. But all that it seems necessary to say on this head is, that as the law required no more than two or three witnesses to constitute a regular and judicial proof, our Saviour frequently chose to have only this number of witnesses present at some of the most important and interesting scenes of his life. The three disciples, whom he now selected, were those that generally attended him on such occasions, and who seem to have been distinguished as his most intimate and confidential friends. St. John, we know, was so in an eminent degree. St. James, his brother, would, from that near connexion, probably be brought more frequently under his Master's notice; and as St. Peter was the very person who had expressed himself with so much indignation on the subject of our Saviour's sufferings, it was highly proper and necessary that he should be admitted to a spectacle, which was purposely calculated to calm those emotions, and remove that disgust which the first mention of them had produced in his mind.

With these companions, then, Jesus ascended the mountain, and was transfigured before them; "and behold, there appeared Moses and Elias talking with him." They were not only *seen* by the disciples, but they were *heard* also conversing with Jesus. This is a circumstance of great importance, especially when we are told what the subject of their conversation was. St. Luke gives us this useful piece of information; he says, that "they spake of our Lord's decease, which he should accomplish at Jerusalem." The very *mention* of Christ's sufferings and death by such men as Moses and Elias, without any marks of surprise or dissatis-

faction, was of itself sufficient to occasion a great change in the sentiments of the disciples respecting those sufferings, and to soften those prejudices of theirs against them, the removal of which seems to have been one of the more immediate objects of the transfiguration. But if we suppose farther (what is far from being improbable) that in the course of the conversation several interesting particulars respecting our Saviour's crucifixion were brought under discussion ; if they entered at any length into that important subject, *the great work of our redemption* ; if they touched upon the nature, the cause, and the consequences of it ; the pardon of sin, the restitution to God's favour, the triumph over death, and the gift of eternal life ; if they showed that the sufferings of Christ were prefigured in the law, and foretold by the prophets ; it is easy to see, that topics such as these must tend still farther to open the eyes, and remove the prepossessions of his disciples ; and the more so, because they would seem to arise incidentally in a discourse between other persons casually overheard ; which, having no appearance of design or professed opposition in it, would be apt to make a deeper impression on their minds than a direct and open attack upon their prejudices.

But the circumstance which would, probably, be most effectual in correcting the erroneous ideas of his disciples on this head, was the act of the transfiguration itself, the astonishing change it produced in the whole of our Lord's external appearance.

From the expressions made use of by the several evangelists, this change appears to have been a very illustrious one. They inform us, that, "as our Saviour prayed, the fashion of his countenance was changed ;

his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment became exceeding white and glistening; as white as snow, as white as the light, so as no fuller on earth could whiten it." Now Christ having assumed this splendid and glorious appearance at the very time when Moses and Elias were conversing with him on his sufferings, it was a *visible* and striking proof to his disciples, that those sufferings were not, as they imagined, any real discredit and disgrace to him, but were perfectly consistent with the dignity of his character, and the highest state of glory to which he could be exalted.

But farther still; Jesus had (in the conversation mentioned in the preceding chapter) told his disciples, that the Son of man should come *in the glory of his Father*, with his holy angels, to judge the world. The scene on the mount therefore *which so soon followed that conversation*, was probably meant to convey to them some idea and some evidence of *his coming in glory* at the great day of judgement, of which his transfiguration was, perhaps, as just a picture and exemplification as human sight could bear.

It is, indeed, described in nearly the same terms that St. John in the Revelation applies to the Son of man in his *state of glory* in heaven. "He was clothed (says he) with a garment down to the foot. His head and his hair were white like wool, white as snow; and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength." It is remarkable, that St. Luke calls his appearance, after being transfigured, *his glory*. St. John, who was likewise present at this appearance, gives it the same name. "We beheld *his glory*, as of the only begotten of the Father." And St. Peter, who was another witness to this transaction on the Mount, refers to it by a similar expression. "For he received (says that

Apostle) from God the Father, *honour and glory*, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*." There can hardly therefore remain any doubt, but that *the glory which Christ received from the Father*, on the mountain, was meant to be a representation of his coming *in the glory of his Father*, with his holy angels, at the end of the world; which is one of the topics touched upon in the preceding chapter.

Another thing there mentioned was *our Saviour's resurrection*. Of this, indeed, there is no direct symbol in the transfiguration: but it is evidently implied in that transaction; because Jesus is there represented in his glorified, celestial state, which being in the natural order of time subsequent to his resurrection, that event must naturally be supposed to have previously taken place.

But though this great event is only indirectly alluded to here, yet those most important doctrines which are founded upon it, *a general resurrection, and a day of retribution*, are expressly represented in the transfiguration.

In the sixteenth chapter of St. Matthew, Christ tells his disciples, that when "he comes in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels, he will reward every man according to his works*:" from whence it necessarily follows, that every man who is dead shall rise from the grave. And in confirmation of both these truths, there are two just and righteous men, Moses and Elias, who had many years before departed out of the world, brought back to it again, and represented (as we shall see hereafter) in a state of glory. That they actually appeared in their own proper persons,

* 2 Pet. i. 17.

† Ver. 27.

there is not the least reason to doubt. Grotius even goes so far as to affirm, that their bodies were *reserved* for this very purpose. But there is no necessity and no ground for this imagination. For though, indeed, the sepulchre of Moses was not known, yet his body was actually buried in a valley in the land of Moab, and therefore must have seen corruption; and as the whole transaction was miraculous, it was just as easy to Omnipotence to restore life and form to a body mouldered into dust, as to reanimate a body that was preserved uncorrupted and entire; and, indeed, was a much exacter emblem of our own resurrection. We may, however, readily admit, what some learned men have justly observed, that, Elias having been carried up into heaven without undergoing death, he was here a proper representative of those who shall be found *alive* at the day of judgement, as Moses is of those who had died, and are raised to life again. And his appearance a second time on earth, after he had been so many ages dead and buried, must have been a convincing proof to the disciples (had they duly attended to it) of the possibility of a resurrection.

And what is no less important, the *manner* in which both Moses and Elias appeared on this occasion, afforded the disciples an ocular demonstration of *a day of retribution*, agreeably to what their Divine Master had a few days before told them, *that he would reward every man according to his works.*

For as we are informed, that both Moses and Elias appeared also in *glory*; a glory somewhat similar, we may suppose, though far inferior, to that with which Christ was invested; like him they were probably clothed in raiments of unusual whiteness and splendour; and the fashion of their countenances might also

be changed to something more bright and illustrious. Now this would be a just representation of the *glorified state* of saints in heaven, of those who had been rewarded according to their works. For we find those holy men, who have passed victoriously through their Christian warfare, described by St. John as clothed in *white raiments**; and by St. Matthew, as *shining forth like the sun* in the kingdom of their Father†.

The *glory of Christ* therefore on the mountain, was a symbol of his exaltation to be the judge of the earth; and the *glory of Moses and Elias*, was an emblem of the rewards given to the righteous in heaven.

When all these circumstances are put together, they throw considerable light over the concluding part of Christ's conversation, which has not yet been noticed, *Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.*‡ This has commonly been supposed to refer to the signal manifestation of Christ's power in the destruction of Jerusalem. But we know of no one of Christ's disciples that survived this event, except St. John; and our Saviour here speaks of more than one. But besides this, in the 27th verse of this chapter, we are told that *the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father, to reward every man according to his works.* This, undoubtedly, relates to Christ's final advent to judge the world. When, therefore, it immediately follows in the very next verse, *Verily, I say unto you, that there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of man coming*

* Rev. iii. 5.

† Matt. xiii. 43.

‡ Matthew xvi. 28.—St. Mark says, "Till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power."—St. Luke, "Till they see the kingdom of God."

in his kingdom; is it not most natural, is it not almost necessary to understand these similar expressions as relating to the same great event ?

But did Christ then mean to say here that some of his disciples should live to the day of judgement? Most assuredly not. He meant only to intimate that a few of them should, before their death, be favoured with a *representation* of the glorious appearance of Christ and his saints on that awful day. And this illustrious scene was actually displayed to three of them, about six days after, in the transfiguration on the mountain. Indeed St. Peter himself, who was present at the transfiguration, plainly alludes to it, in a manner which powerfully confirms this opinion. “ We have not,” says he, “ followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the *power* and *coming* of our Lord Jesus Christ.” That is, our Lord’s coming in his *kingdom* with *power* and *glory*, and *majesty*, to judge the world. And how does St. Peter here prove that he will so come? Why, by declaring that he and the two other disciples, James and John, were *eye-witnesses of his majesty*; that is, they actually saw him on the Mount, invested with *majesty* and *glory* similar to that which he would assume in his kingdom at the last day. “ For,” continues the apostle, “ he received from God the Father, *honour* and *glory*, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; and this voice, which came from heaven, we heard, *when we were with him in the holy mount**.”

This is St. Peter’s own comment on the transfiguration, in which he expressly compares Christ’s *glory* and *majesty* on the Mount, to that which he will display

* 2 Pet. i. 16, 17, 18.

in his final advent ; and considers the former as an emblem, an earnest, and a proof of the latter.

It is then evident, I think, from the foregoing observations, that the scene upon the mountain was a *symbolical representation of Christ's coming in glory to judge the world, and of the rewards which shall then be given to the righteous*, topics which had been touched upon in Christ's discourse with his disciples six days before ; and that one great object of this expressive action, as well as of that conversation, was to reconcile the minds of his disciples to the sufferings which both he and they were to undergo, by showing that they were preparatory and subservient to *his* future glory, and *their* future rewards.

The other great purpose of the action on the Mount was, I apprehend, to signify in a figurative manner, *the cessation of the Jewish and the commencement of the Christian dispensation*.

It appears to have been one prevailing prejudice among the disciples, that the whole Mosaical law, the ceremonial as well as the moral, was to continue in full force under the gospel ; and that the authority of Moses and the prophets was not, in any respect, to give way on the establishment of Christianity, but to be placed on an equal footing with that of Christ.

To correct this erroneous opinion, no less than to vanquish their prepossessions against the sufferings of Christ (as already explained), was the scene of the transfiguration presented to the three chosen disciples, Peter, James, and John.

There are several remarkable circumstances attending that event, which lead us to this conclusion.

Moses and Elias must certainly be allowed to be

very natural and proper representatives of the *law* and the *prophets*.

When the three disciples saw these illustrious persons conversing familiarly with Jesus, it probably confirmed them in their opinion, that they were to be considered as of *equal* dignity and authority with him; and under this impression, Peter immediately addressed himself to Jesus, and said, “ Lord, it is good for us to be here; and if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles, one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.” The full meaning of which exclamation was, “ What greater happiness, Lord, can we experience than to continue here in the presence of three such great and excellent persons! Here then let us for ever remain! Here let us erect three tents, for thee, for Moses, and Elias, that you may all make this the constant place of your abode, and that we may always continue under the protection and government, and UNITED EMPIRE of our three illustrious lords and masters, whose sovereign laws and commands we are *equally* bound to obey!”

The answer to this extraordinary proposal was instantly given both by action and by words. “ While he yet spake, behold a bright cloud overshadowed them: and, behold, a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: HEAR YE HIM.”

The CLOUD is the well-known token of the divine presence under the law: many instances of it occur in the Old Testament, but more particularly at the giving of the law on Mount Sinai. On the mountain where our Saviour was transfigured, a new law was declared to have taken place; and therefore God again appears

in a *cloud*. But there is one remarkable difference between these two manifestations of the divine presence. On Mount Sinai the cloud was *dark* and *thick*: “and there were thunders and lightnings, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud, and all the people that were in the camp *trembled**.” At the transfiguration, on the contrary, the cloud was *bright*, the whole scene was luminous and transporting, and nothing was heard but the mild paternal voice of the Almighty expressing his delight in his beloved Son. These striking differences in the two appearances evidently point out the different tempers of the two dispensations; of which, the former, from its severity, was more calculated to excite terror; the latter, from its gentleness, to inspire love.

This circumstance alone, therefore, indicated a happy change in the divine œconomy; but the gracious words which issued from the cloud most clearly explained the meaning of what was passing before the eyes of the disciples, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: HEAR YE HIM.” “This is my *Son*, not as Moses and all the prophets were, my *servants*. HIM, and him only, you are now to hear. He is from henceforth to be your lord, your legislator, and your king. The evangelical law being established, the ceremonial law must cease; and MOSES and the PROPHETS must give way to CHRIST.” With this declaration, the conclusion of the whole scene on the mountain perfectly harmonizes. Moses and Elias instantly disappear, and “when the disciples lift up their eyes, they see no man save Jesus only.” The former objects of their veneration are no more. Christ re-

* Exod. xix. 16.

mains *alone* their unrivalled and undisputed sovereign.

In support of this interpretation it may be further observed, that there was reason to expect about that time, some such declaration as this respecting the cessation of the Mosaical law. For St. Luke informs us, that the “law and the prophets were until John;” that is, they were to continue in force till John the Baptist had (as our Lord expresses it) *restored all things*, had preached those great doctrines of repentance and redemption by the blood of Christ, by which men were *restored* to a right state of mind, and the favour of God; till he had thus prepared the way for the Messiah, and publicly announced the kingdom of God; and then they were to be superseded by the Christian dispensation. Accordingly, not long after the death of John, the scene of the transfiguration took place; and this great revolution, this substitution of a new system for the old one, was made known, in that remarkable manner, to the three disciples. This secondary meaning here assigned to the vision on the Mount, will assist us in explaining an injunction of our Lord to his disciples, for which, though other reasons have been assigned, yet they are not, I think, altogether satisfactory.

In the 9th verse we are told, that as they came down from the Mount, Jesus charged the disciples, saying, “Tell the vision to no man, till the Son of man be risen again from the dead.”

If the only intent of the transfiguration had been to represent, by an expressive action, our Lord’s resurrection and exaltation, and a future day of retribution, it is not easy to assign a sufficient reason why this injunction of secrecy, till after his resurrection, should

have been given; because he had already foretold his resurrection to his disciples*, and he also apprised them, before his death, of his coming in glory to judge the world†. It does not therefore appear, how the publication of the vision on the Mount could have been attended with any other consequence, than that of *confirming* what Jesus had already made known.

But if we suppose that *one* purpose of the transfiguration was to typify the abolition of the ceremonial law, and the establishment of the evangelical, a plain reason presents itself for this command of keeping it for some time private; for it was one of those truths which the first converts were not able to bear. Great numbers of them, though they firmly believed in Christ, yet no less firmly believed that the Mosaical dispensation was still in full force. This prejudice, it is well known, continued several years after our Lord's resurrection. Mention is made "of several thousand Jews who believed, and yet were all zealous of the law." And it was the suspicion that St. Paul had forsaken, and taught others to forsake Moses, which brought his life into the most imminent danger, and actually occasioned his imprisonment. No wonder then that a transaction which was designed to prefigure this very doctrine that St. Paul was charged with, and that was so offensive to the Jewish converts in general, should be thought unfit by our Lord to be publicly divulged till some time, perhaps a considerable time, after his resurrection.

From the whole, then, of the preceding observations, it appears, that the transfiguration of Christ was one of those emblematical actions, or figurative representations, of which so many instances have

* Chap. xvi. 21.

† Chap. xxv.

been pointed out, and at the same time very distinctly explained, and elegantly illustrated, by some of our best divines.

The things represented by this significant transaction were :

First, the future glory of Christ, a general resurrection, and a future retribution.

Secondly, the abrogation of the Mosaical, and the establishment of the evangelical dispensation.

And the *immediate* purpose of these representations was, as I before observed, to correct two inveterate prejudices which prevailed among the disciples, and the Jewish converts in general.

Of these, one was the extreme offence they took at any mention of the death and sufferings of Christ, which they conceived to be utterly inconsistent with his dignity.

The other was their persuasion that the ceremonial law was not done away by the gospel, but that they were to exist together in full force, and to have an equal obedience paid to them by all the disciples of Christ.

But though the removal of these prejudices was, as I conceive, the primary and immediate design of the transfiguration, yet there are also purposes of great utility to all Christians in general, in every age, which it might be, and probably was, intended to answer.

In the first place, it affords one more additional proof of the divine mission of Christ, and the divine authority of his religion.

It is one of the few occasions on which God himself was pleased, as it were, *personally to interpose*, and to make an open declaration from heaven in favour of his Son; “this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well

pleased: HEAR YE HIM." Two other instances only of this kind occur in the gospels; one at our Saviour's baptism, the other on his praying to his Father to save him from the sufferings that awaited him.

Now these signs from heaven may be considered *as a distinct species of evidence*, different both from miracles and prophecies, frequently and earnestly wished for by the Jews, but not granted to them, nor vouchsafed to any one, but very sparingly, and on great and solemn occasions.

But besides this awful testimony to the divine origin of our religion in general, a particular attestation was (as we have seen) given on the Mount to two of its principal doctrines, A GENERAL RESURRECTION, and A DAY OF RETRIBUTION. The visible and illustrious representation of these in the glorified appearance of Christ, and Moses and Elias, has been already explained, and is appealed to by St. Peter, who saw it, as one convincing proof, among others, that "he had not followed cunningly devised fables," when he made known "the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." And indeed, since these two doctrines, A RESURRECTION, and A DAY OF JUDGEMENT, are two of the most essential and fundamental articles of our faith; and since it was one of the chief purposes of the Christian revelation, "to bring life and immortality to light," no wonder that God should graciously condescend to confirm these great truths to us in so many various ways; by words and by actions, by prophecies, by miracles, and by celestial visions.

LECTURE XVI.

MATTHEW XVIII.

THE subject of this Lecture is a part of the eighteenth chapter of St. Matthew.

It is evident that the disciples of our Lord were, for a considerable time, possessed with the imagination which prevailed universally among the Jews respecting their Messiah, that their Master's kingdom was to be a temporal one; that he was at some time or other to become a prince of great power and splendour, and that they of course should enjoy the largest share of his favour, and be placed in situations of great distinction and great emolument. And this delusion had taken such strong hold upon their minds, that although our Lord took frequent opportunities of combating their error, and made use of every means in his power to undeceive them, yet they still persisted in maintaining their favourite opinion; and in the beginning of this chapter they came to Jesus, saying, who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? It appears, from the parallel passage in St. Mark, that they had been disputing by the way who should be the greatest. Our Lord knowing this, and finding that all he had said on this subject had produced no effect upon them, determined to try whether a different mode of conveying his sentiments to them might not strike their

minds more forcibly. He therefore had recourse (as in the case of the transfiguration) to what may be called a visible kind of language. He took a little child, and, placing him before them, bid them contemplate the innocence and simplicity, the meekness and humility which marked its countenance; and then assured them, that unless they were converted, and became as little children; that is, unless a total change took place in the temper and disposition of their minds, unless they became as unambitious and un aspiring, as meek, as humble and contented, as little concerned about worldly honours and distinctions, as the child before them, they could not enter into the kingdom of heaven; they could never be considered as true objects of Christ's kingdom here, or be capable of inheriting the rewards of heaven hereafter. In the eye of God, true humility is a most sublime virtue; and whoever shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Our Lord then goes on to say, "Whosoever receiveth one such little child in my name, receiveth me." That is, it is men of humble minds and meek dispositions, whom I most highly prize, and whom I most strongly recommend to the notice, the kindness, the protection of all those who are friends to me and my religion; and so dear are men of this description to me, that I make their interests my own, and I shall consider every man who receives, and assists, and encourages them on my account, and for my sake, as receiving me. But if, instead of receiving and protecting these my humble disciples, any one should dare to injure them, he must expect the severest marks of my displeasure. "Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a mill-stone

were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe unto the world, because of offences; for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh."

In order to comprehend the full meaning of this denunciation, it will be necessary to explain the peculiar meaning of the word *offend*. Now this expression in the present passage, as well as in many other parts of the New Testament, signifies to cause any one to *fall from his faith*, to renounce his belief in Christ by any means whatever; and against every one that makes use either of violence or artifice to terrify or seduce the sincere, and humble, and unsuspecting believer in Christ from his faith and obedience to his divine Master, the severest woes and the heaviest punishments are here denounced.

This text of scripture therefore I would most earnestly recommend to the serious consideration of those who either are or have been guilty of this most dangerous crime; and I would also no less earnestly caution all those who have not yet been guilty of it, to avoid, with the utmost care, every degree of it, and every approach to it. It is a crime often touched upon in holy writ, but less noticed, or at least less enlarged upon by divines and moralists than perhaps any other sin of the same magnitude. For this reason I shall enter more fully into the consideration of it than has hitherto, I believe, been usually done, and shall advert briefly to the several modes of *making our brother to offend*, that is, to renounce his faith in Christ, which are most common and most successful; and these are persecution, sophistry, ridicule, immoral examples, and immoral publications.

With respect to the first of these, persecution; it was, during the first ages of the gospel, and for many years after the Reformation, the great *rock of offence*, the chief instrument made use of (and a dreadful one it was) to deter men from embracing the faith of Christ, or to compel them to renounce it. But since that time we have heard little of its terrors, till they were some years ago revived, to a certain degree, in a neighbouring nation, where the various cruelties inflicted on their clergy are too well known, and cannot surely be ascribed altogether and exclusively to political causes.

In our own country, it must be acknowledged, we cannot justly be charged with this species of guilt. Intolerance and persecution are certainly not in the number of our national sins. But in the next mode of making our brother to offend, that is, by grave argument and reason, by open and systematic attacks on the truth and divine authority of the Christian revelation, in this we have, I fear, a large load of responsibility upon our heads.

It has even been affirmed by some, that we are entitled to the distinction of having led the way to this kind of impiety and profaneness. We have this honour given to us (for an honour *they* esteem it) by foreign writers, and what is worst of all, we are applauded for it by such men as D'Alembert and Voltaire.

To be stigmatized with *their* praise, and for such a reason, is a disgrace indeed; and it would be a still greater, if we could not justly disclaim and throw back from ourselves the humiliating and ignominious applause which they would inflict upon us. But this I apprehend we may effectually do. There appears to me sufficient ground for asserting, that the earliest

infidels of modern times were to be found, not in this island, but on the continent. If we may credit the account given of Peter Aretin (who lived and wrote in the fourteenth century) by Moreri, and particularly the epitaph upon him, which he recites, there is reason to believe that he was an infidel of the worst species ; and Viret, a divine of great eminence among the first reformers, who wrote about the year 1563, speaks of a number of persons, both in France and Italy, who had assumed the name of Deists, and seem to have formed themselves into a sect. But it was not till the beginning of the following century that any men of that description, or any publications hostile to Revelation, appeared in this kingdom. From that time indeed down to the present, there has been a regular succession of anti-christian writers of various descriptions and various talents, whose uniform object has been to subvert the foundations of revealed religion, and to make their countrymen *offend*, and renounce their faith. The last of these was a man, who, from the lowest origin, raised himself to some distinction in the political and literary world, by his bold and impious libels against government, against religion, and the holy scriptures themselves. In these writings were concentrated all the malignity, all the shrewdness, all the sophistry of his numerous predecessors ; and from their brevity, their plainness, their familiarity, their vulgar ribaldry, their bold assertions, and artful misrepresentations, they were better calculated to impose on the ignorant and uninformed, and more dangerous to the principles of the great mass of mankind, than any publications that this country ever before produced. And certain it is, that having been distributed with infinite industry through every district of the

kingdom, they did for a time diffuse their poison far and wide, and made a strong and fatal impression on the multitude. But, thanks be to God! they at length providentially met with talents infinitely superior to those of their illiterate author, which, with the blessing of Heaven upon them, gave a sudden and effectual check to the progress of this mischief, and afforded a striking proof of the truth of that prophecy respecting the stability of our religion, “that the gates of hell shall never prevail against it.”

The next great engine of offence, by which multitudes have been led to renounce their faith, is *ridicule*. An attempt was made early in the last century to erect this into *a test of truth*, and it has accordingly been applied by many writers since that time to throw discredit on the Christian revelation. But by no one has this weapon been employed with more force and with more success, than by the great patriarch of infidelity, Voltaire. It is the principal instrument he makes use of to vilify the gospel; and among the instructions he gives to his coadjutors and fellow-labourers in this righteous work, *one* is to load the Christian religion and the Author of it with never-ceasing ridicule, to burlesque it in every way that imagination can suggest, and to deluge the world with an infinity of little tracts, placing Revelation in the most ludicrous point of view, and rendering it an object of mirth and of contempt to the lowest of mankind. This method he strictly pursued himself; to this he bent all the powers of his mind, all the vivacity of his wit, all the fire of his imagination; and whoever examines his writings against Christianity with care, will find that much the largest part of them are of this description. And in this he showed a

thorough knowledge of the world. He knew that mankind in general prefer wit to logic, and love to be entertained rather than convinced; that it is much easier to point an epigram than to produce an argument; that few can reason justly, but that all the world can be made to laugh; and that whatever can be rendered an object of derision, is almost sure to be rejected without examination. Of all these artifices he has availed himself with infinite address, and we know also with fatal success. His writings have unquestionably produced more infidels among the higher classes, and spread more general corruption over the world, than all the voluminous productions of all the other philosophists of Europe put together.

There is still another way of making our brother to *offend*, or in other words of shaking his faith in the gospel; and that is, by exhibiting to mankind in our life and conversation a profligate example.

This, in the first place, gives the world an unfavourable idea of the religion we profess. It tempts men to think either that we ourselves do not believe it, or that we suppose it consistent with the vices to which we are abandoned; and either of these suppositions must considerably lessen their estimation both of its doctrines and its precepts.

In the next place, a wicked example, as we all know, tends to corrupt in some degree every one that lives within its baneful influence; more particularly if it be found in men of high rank, great wealth, splendid talents, profound erudition, or popular characters. The mischief done by any notorious vices in men of this description is inconceivable. It spreads like a pestilence, and destroys thousands in secrecy and silence, of whom the offender himself knows nothing,

and whom probably he never meant to injure; and wherever the heart is corrupted, the principle of faith is proportionably weakened; for no man that gives a loose to his passions will choose to have so troublesome a monitor near him as the gospel. When he has learned to disregard the moral precepts of that divine volume, it requires but a very slight effort to reject its doctrines, and then to disbelieve the truth of the whole.

A dissolute life, then, especially in particular classes of men, is one certain way of making our brother to offend, not only in point of practice, but of belief; and there is another method of producing the same effects, nearly allied to this, and that is, *immoral publications*.

These have the same tendency with bad examples, both in propagating vice and promoting infidelity; but they are still more pernicious, because the sphere of their influence is more extensive.

A bad example, though it operates fatally, operates comparatively within a small circumference. It extends only to those who are near enough to observe it, and fall within the reach of the poisonous infection that spreads around it; but the contagion of a licentious publication, especially if it be (as it too frequently is) in a popular and captivating shape, knows no bounds; it flies to the remotest corners of the earth; it penetrates the obscure and retired habitations of simplicity and innocence; it makes its way into the cottage of the peasant, into the hut of the shepherd, and the shop of the mechanic; it falls into the hands of all ages, ranks, and conditions; but it is peculiarly fatal to the unsuspecting and unguarded minds of the youth of both sexes; and to them its "breath is poison, and its touch is death."

What then have *they* to answer for, who are every day obtruding these publications on the world, in a thousand different shapes and forms, in history, in biography, in poems, in novels, in dramatic pieces; in all which the prevailing feature is *universal philanthropy and indiscriminate benevolence*; under the protection of which the hero of the piece has the privilege of committing whatever irregularities he thinks fit; and while he is violating the most sacred obligations, insinuating the most licentious sentiments, and ridiculing every thing that looks like religion, he is nevertheless held up as a model of virtue; and though he may perhaps be charged with a few little venial foibles, and pardonable infirmities, (as they are called) yet we are assured that he has notwithstanding *the very best heart in the world*. Thus it is that the principles of our youth are insensibly and almost unavoidably corrupted; and instead of being inspired, as they ought to be, even upon the stage, with a just detestation of vice, they are furnished with apologies for it, which they never forget, and are even taught to consider it as a necessary part of an accomplished character.

And as if we had not enough of this disgusting nonsense and abominable profligacy in our own country, and in our own language, we are every day importing fresh samples of them from abroad, are ingrafting foreign immorality on our own native stock, and introducing characters on the stage, or into the closet, which are calculated to recommend the most licentious principles, and favour irregularities and attachments that deserve the severest reprehension and punishment.

These are the several modes in which we may weaken or even destroy the moral and religious prin-

ciples of very sincere Christians, or, in the words of scripture, *may make our brother to offend*. And whoever is guilty of *giving* this offence, ought most seriously to consider the heavy punishment, and the bitter woe, which our Lord here denounces against it. There is scarce any one sin noticed by him which he reprobates in such strong terms as this: "Whoso shall *offend* one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe unto the world because of offences; for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh." These are tremendous words; but we cannot wonder that our Lord should express himself thus strongly, when we consider the dreadful consequences of spreading infidelity and immorality among our fellow-creatures. We distress them with doubts and scruples which never before entered into their thoughts; we rob them of the most invaluable blessings of life, of that heavenly consolation and support which is derived from religious sentiments and virtuous habits; of that trust and confidence in the Supreme Disposer of all things, which gives ease and comfort to the afflicted soul; of that unspeakable satisfaction which results from a conscientious discharge of our duty; and of that peace of God which passeth all understanding. But what is still worse, we not only deprive them of the truest comforts of the present life, but we cut off all their hopes of happiness in the next; we take from them the only sure ground of pardon and acceptance, the death and merits of a crucified Redeemer: we bar up against them the gates of heaven, into which but for us they might have entered, and perhaps consign

them over to everlasting perdition. Is not this beyond comparison the greatest injury that one human creature can inflict upon another? And does it not justly merit that severe sentence which our Lord has pronounced against it? Let then every one keep at the utmost distance from this most atrocious crime. Let every man who commits his thoughts to the public, take especial care that nothing drop even incidentally from his pen that can offend those whom our Saviour calls *little children* that believe in him; that can either stagger their faith or corrupt their hearts. Let every father of a family be equally careful that nothing escape his lips in the unguarded hour of familiar converse, that can be dangerous to the religious principles of his children, his friends, or his servants; nothing that tends to lessen their reverence for the sacred writings, their respect for the doctrines, the precepts, or the sacred ordinances of religion, or raise any doubts or scruples in their minds respecting the truth or divine authority of the Christian revelation. I mention these things, because even the friends of religion are sometimes apt, through mere inadvertence or thoughtlessness, to indulge themselves in pleasantries, even upon serious subjects, which though meant at the time merely to entertain their hearers, or to display their wit, yet often produce a very different effect, and sink much deeper into the minds of those that are present (especially of young people) than they are in the least aware of. More mischief may sometimes be done by incidental levities of this kind, than by grave discourses or elaborate writings against religion.

I have dwelt the longer on this interesting topic, because few people are aware of the enormity of the sin here reprov'd by our Lord, of the irreparable injury it

may do to others, and of the danger to which it exposes themselves. But when they reflect, that by the commission of this crime they endanger the present peace and the future salvation of their fellow-creatures, and expose themselves to the woes which our Lord has in the passage before us denounced against those from whom these offences come, they will probably feel it their duty to be more guarded in this instance than men generally are; and will take heed to their ways, that they offend not either with their pen or with their tongue.

I now go on with the remaining part of our Lord's admonition to his disciples.

After having said in the 7th verse, "Woe unto the world because of offences; for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh;" he then adds, "Wherefore, if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off and cast them from thee; it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire; and if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee; it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire."

Our Saviour here applies to the particular sin which he was then condemning, the very same words which he had used before in his sermon on the Mount with reference to the crime of adultery; and the meaning is this:

The heinous sin, against which I have been here cautioning you, that of offending your Christian brethren, of causing them by your misconduct to renounce their faith in me or to desert the paths of virtue, has its origin in your depraved appetites and passions; as in

the present instance it is your ambition, your eagerness after worldly honours and distinctions, which it is to be feared will give offence and scandal to those that observe it, and may impress them with an unfavourable idea of that religion which seems to inspire such sentiments. You must therefore go at once to the root of the evil, you must extirpate those corrupt passions and propensities that have taken possession of your hearts, though it may be as difficult for you to part with them as it would be to pluck out an eye, or tear off a limb from the body. For it is better that you should renounce what is most dear to you in this life, than that you should suffer those dreadful punishments in the next, which I have told you will assuredly be inflicted on all impenitent offenders, and more particularly on those who offend in the way here specified.

He then returns to the main subject of his exhortation: "take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones: for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." That is, I again repeat to you, take heed that ye treat not with scorn and contempt such little children as you now see before you, or those believers in me who resemble these children in docility, meekness, humility, and indifference to all that the world calls great and honourable. Take care that you do not consider their welfare, their salvation, as below your notice and regard, and wantonly endanger both by giving way to your own irregular desires; for I say unto you, that however contemptibly you may think of them, your heavenly Father regards them with a more favourable eye. He even condescends to take them under his protection, he sends his most favoured angels, those ministers of his that do his pleasure, and

stand always in his presence ready to execute his commands, even these he deutes to guard and watch over these little children, and those humble Christians, who are like them in purity and innocence of mind.

From this passage some have inferred, that every child and every faithful servant of Christ has an angel constantly attached to his person, to superintend, direct, and protect him; and this is the opinion of the learned Grotius himself; whilst others only suppose that those celestial spirits, who (as we are told of Gabriel) *stand before God*, are occasionally sent to assist the pious Christian in imminent danger, in severe trials, or great emergencies. And hence perhaps the favourite and popular doctrine of *guardian angels*: a doctrine which has prevailed more or less in every age of the church, which is without question most soothing and consolatory to human nature, and is certainly countenanced by this and several other passages of holy writ, as well as by the authority of Origen, Tertullian, and other ancient fathers and commentators. In the Psalms it is said, “The angel of the Lord tarrieth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them*.” And in the Epistle to the Hebrews† we are told, “that the angels are all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation.” No one therefore that cherishes this notion can be charged with weakness or superstition; and if it should be at last an error, it is, as Cicero says of the immortality of the soul, so delightful an error, that we cannot easily suffer it to be wrested from us‡. But whatever may

* Psal. xxxiv. 7.

† Chap. i. 14.

‡ The excellent Bishop Andrews has, in one of his animated prayers, a passage which plainly shows that he believed this doctrine. It is as follows: “That the angel of peace, the holy guide of thy children, the faithful guard set by thee

be the decision of learned men on this point, there is one thing most clearly proved by the text now before us, and confirmed by a multitude of others, and that is, the doctrine not only of a general but of a particular providence, which in one way or other, whether by ministering angels, or by the all-comprehending and omnipresent eye of God himself, watches over those true disciples of Christ, who, in their tempers, dispositions, and manners, approach nearest to the humility, the meekness, the innocence, and the simplicity of a child.

This doctrine is indeed so distinctly and explicitly asserted in various parts of Scripture, that it stands in no need of any confirmation from this particular passage; but every additional proof of so material a support under the afflictions and calamities of life, must be grateful to every heart that has known what affliction is.

The verse that comes next in order is this: "For the Son of man is come to save that which is lost." The connexion of this verse with the preceding one is somewhat obscure, but seems to be as follows: You may think, perhaps, that man is too mean, too insignificant a being, to be worthy of the ministration and guardianship of celestial spirits. But how can you entertain this imagination, when you know that for this creature man, for fallen and sinful man, did the Son of God condescend to offer himself up a sacrifice on the cross, and came to save that which was lost? Well then may the angels of heaven be proud to guard what their Lord and Master came to save. Jesus then goes

over their souls and bodies, may encamp round about me, and continually suggest to my mind such things as conduce to thy glory, grant, O good Lord!"

on to exemplify, by a familiar similitude, his paternal tenderness to the sons of men. “How think ye, if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and go into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep than of the ninety and nine that went not astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father that one of these little ones should perish.” We are not to infer from this similitude, that God sets more value, and looks with more complacency and approbation on one repenting sinner, than on ninety and nine righteous persons who have uniformly and devoutly served him. This can never be imagined; nor would it correspond with the illustration. The shepherd himself does not set a greater value upon the lost sheep than he does upon those that are safe; nor would he give up them to recover that which has strayed. But his joy *for the moment*, at the recovery of the lost sheep, is greater than he receives from all the rest, because he has regained that, and is sure of all the others. The whole, therefore, that was meant to be inculcated by this parable is, that God’s parental tenderness extends to all, even to the sinner that goes astray, and that he rejoices at the conversion and recovery of the meanest individual, and of the most grievous offender. This is the very conclusion, and the only one which our Lord himself draws from the parable. “Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.”

Such then being the mercy of the Almighty even to his sinful creatures, our Lord goes on to intimate to his disciples, that *they* ought also to exercise a similar

lenity and forbearance towards their offending brethren. “ If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone. If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established; and if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.” In this passage there are evident allusions to the laws and customs of the Jews, who, for the conviction of any offender, required the testimony of at least two witnesses* ; and in the case of notorious and obstinate offenders, reprov'd them publicly in their synagogues. But the obvious meaning in regard to ourselves is, that even against those who have ill-treated and injured us, we should not immediately proceed to extreme severity and rigour; but first try the effects of private, and gentle, and friendly admonition; if that fail, then call in two or three persons of character and reputation to add weight and authority to our remonstrances; and if that has no effect, we are then justified in bringing the offender before the proper tribunal, to be censured or punished as he deserves, avoiding all communication with him in future, except what common humanity may require even towards an enemy. These directions are evidently the dictates of that moderation, mildness, and benevolence, which characterize all our Saviour’s precepts, and more particularly distinguish this chapter.

“ Verily I say unto you,” continues our Saviour, “ whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be

* Deut. xix. 15.

loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven; for where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

There is some difficulty and some difference of opinion with respect to the precise meaning of these verses; but they evidently have a reference to the case of the offender stated in the preceding verses; they are addressed exclusively to the apostles; and the most natural interpretation of them seems to be as follows: Whatever sentence of absolution or condemnation you shall in your apostolical capacity pronounce on any offender, that sentence shall be confirmed in heaven; and whatever even two of you shall ask in prayer for direction and assistance from above, in forming your judicial determinations, it shall be granted you; for where only two or three of you are gathered together in my name, and are acting under my authority and for my glory in any case of great importance, there am I in the midst of you by my Holy Spirit, to guide, direct, and sanction your proceedings.

We now come to one of the most interesting and most affecting parables that is to be found either in Scripture, or in any of the most admired writings of antiquity. In consequence of what our Lord had said in the course of his instructions on the subject of *injuries*, Peter came to him, and said, "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" an allowance which he probably thought abundantly liberal. Jesus saith unto him, "I say not unto thee, until seven times, but until seventy times seven;" that is, this duty of forgiving injuries has no

limits. However frequently you are injured, if real penitence and contrition follow the offence, a Christian is always bound to forgive. To illustrate and confirm this important duty, our Lord subjoins the following parable. "Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought to him which owed him ten thousand talents (that is nearly two millions, some think more than two millions, of our money.) But, forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made." This seems a most severe penalty for insolvency; and yet it was a frequent practice among the Jews*, as we learn both from various passages of the Old Testament, and from Josephus; and we are told by several intelligent travellers, that insolvency is one of the causes of slavery in Africa at this very hour. So perfectly conformable to fact and to the truth of history is every circumstance that occurs in the sacred writings. "The servant therefore fell down and worshipped him," prostrated himself at his master's feet, and in the most moving terms besought him, saying, "Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all." Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out and found one of his fellow servants which owed him an hundred pence (a very trifling sum;) and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, "Pay me that thou owest." He assailed him with far greater violence and brutality than his lord had used towards himself for a debt of ten thousand talents. "And his fellow servant fell

* Exod. xxii. 3. Lev. xxv. 47.

down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all ;” the very same supplicating attitude, the very same affecting words that he had himself made use of towards his lord ; “ and he would not, but went and cast him into prison till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants saw what was done, they were very sorry ;” sorry for the sufferings of the unhappy debtor ; sorry for the disgrace brought on human nature by the unfeeling creditor ; “ and they came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt because thou desiredst me ; shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee ? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors till he should pay all that was due to him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.”

Such is the parable of the unforgiving servant, which I am sure has not only been heard but *felt* by every one here present. It requires no comment or explanation ; the bare repetition of it is sufficient : indeed it cannot be expressed in any other words than its own without impairing its beauty and its strength. Notwithstanding the frequency of its recurrence in the course of our church service, there is no one, I believe, that ever hears it without emotion and delight. Amidst so much excellence as we meet with in the gospel, it is not easy to say what is most excellent ; but if I was to select any one parable of our Lord’s as more interesting, more affecting, coming more home to the feelings, and pressing closer on the hearts of men than

any of the rest, I think it would be this. Certain it is, that in all the characters of excellence, in perspicuity, in brevity, in simplicity, in pathos, in force, it has no equal in any human composition whatever. On its beauties therefore I shall not enlarge, but on its uses and its application to ourselves, I must say a few words.

And in the first place I would observe, that the object of this parable is not only to enforce the duty of cultivating a placable disposition, but a disposition *constantly* placable, always ready to forgive the offences of our brother, however frequently he may repeat those offences. For it was immediately after our Lord had told Peter that he was to forgive his brother not merely seven times, but seventy times seven, that he added this parable to confirm that very doctrine; *therefore*, says he, is the kingdom of heaven like unto a certain king, &c. But then it is only upon this condition, that the offender is sincerely penitent, and entreats forgiveness. This is evident from the parallel passage in St. Luke, which expresses this condition: "If thy brother trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him*." Yet even this will to many people appear a hard saying, and will not very well agree with those high-spirited passions, and that keen sense of injuries, which too generally prevail, and which, instead of forgiving *repeated* offences, will listen to no entreaties, no expressions of contrition, even for a *single* one. But are you then content that your heavenly Father should deal out the same measure to you that you mete to your brother? Are you content that one single offence should exclude you for ever from the arms of his mercy? Are you not

* Luke, xvii. 4.

every day heaping up sin upon sin; do not you stand as much in need of daily forgiveness as you do of your daily bread; and do you think it an *excess* of indulgence, an overstrained degree of tenderness and compassion, that your Maker should pardon you seven times a day, or even seventy times seven?

2. In the next place I would remark, that this parable is a practical comment on that petition in the Lord's Prayer, "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us;" and it shows what infinite stress our Divine Master lays on this duty of forgiveness, by the care he takes to enforce it in so many different ways, by this parable, by making it a part of our daily prayers, and by his repeated declarations that we must expect no mercy from our Maker, "unless we from our hearts forgive every one his brother their trespasses*." To the same purpose are those irresistible words of St. Paul: "Be ye therefore kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you†." Let the hard-hearted unrelenting man of the world, or the obdurate unforgiving parent, advert to these repeated admonitions, and then let him, if he can, indignantly spurn from him the repenting offender entreating pardon at his feet in those heart-piercing words, "have patience with me, and I will pay thee all."

And yet it is dreadful to state, as I must do in the last place, what very little regard is paid to this precept by a large part of mankind.

No man, I believe, ever heard or read the parable before us without feeling his indignation rise against the ungrateful and unfeeling servant, who, after having a debt of ten thousand talents remitted to him by

* Matt. xviii. 35.

† Eph. iv. 32.

his indulgent lord, threw his fellow servant into prison for a debt of an hundred pence. And yet how frequently are we ourselves guilty of the very same offence?

Who is there among us, that has not had ten thousand talents forgiven him by his heavenly Father? Take together all the offences of his life, all his sins and follies from the first hour of his maturity to the present time, and they may well be compared to this immense sum, which immense sum, if he has been a sincere penitent, has been all forgiven through the merits of his Redeemer. Yet when his fellow-Christian owes him an hundred pence, when he commits the slightest offence against him, he too often refuses him forgiveness, though he fall at his feet to implore it.

In fact, do we not every day see men resenting not only real injuries, but slight and even imaginary offences, with extreme vehemence and passion, and sometimes punishing the offender with nothing less than death? Do we not even see families rent asunder, and all domestic tranquillity and comfort destroyed frequently by the most trivial causes, sometimes on one side, and sometimes on both, refusing to listen to any reasonable overtures of peace, haughtily rejecting all offers of reconciliation, insisting on the highest possible satisfaction and submission, and carrying these sentiments of implacable rancour with them to the grave? And yet these people call themselves Christians, and expect to be themselves forgiven at the throne of mercy!

Let then every man of this description remember and most seriously reflect on this parable; let him remember that the unforgiving servant was delivered over to the tormentors till he should pay the uttermost farthing. Let him recollect that all the world approves

this sentence; that he himself cannot but approve it; that he cannot but feel himself to be precisely in the situation of that very servant, and that of course he must at the last tremendous day expect that bitter and unanswerable reproach from his offended Judge; “O thou wicked servant! I forgave thee all that debt because thou desiredst me; shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant even as I had pity on thee?”

LECTURE XVII.

MATTHEW XIX.

THE passage of scripture which I propose to explain in the present Lecture, is a part of the 19th chapter of St. Matthew, beginning at the 16th verse.

“ Behold,” says the evangelist, “ one came and said unto him (meaning Jesus), Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness. Honour thy father and thy mother: and, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The young man saith unto him, all these things have I kept from my youth up; what lack I yet? Jesus said unto him, if thou wilt be *perfect*, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions.”

The conversation here related between the young ruler (for so he is called by St. Luke) and our blessed Lord, cannot but be extremely interesting to every

sincere Christian, who is anxious about his own salvation. A young man of high rank, and of large possessions, came with great haste and eagerness; came *running*, as St. Mark expresses it, to Jesus; and throwing himself at his feet, proposed to him this most important question: "Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" This was not a question of mere curiosity, or an insidious one, as the questions put to our Lord (especially by the rulers) frequently were, but appears to have been dictated by a sincere and anxious wish to be instructed in the way to that everlasting life, which he found Jesus held out to his disciples. His conduct had been conformable to the precepts of that religion in which he was born and educated, the religion of Moses; for when our Lord pointed out to him the commandments he was to keep, his answer was, "all these things have I kept from my youth up;" and his disposition, also, we must conclude to have been an amiable one; for we are told that Jesus *loved him*, beheld him with a certain degree of regard and affection. In this state of mind then he came to Jesus, and asked the question already stated; "Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?"

Our Lord's answer was; "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. The young man saith unto him, which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness. Honour thy father and thy mother: and, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." In this enumeration, it is observable that our Lord does not recite *all* the ten commandments, but only five out of those that compose what is called the second table. Now we cannot imagine that

Jesus meant to say that the observation of a *few* of God's commands would put the young man in possession of eternal life. His intention unquestionably was, by a very common figure of speech, to make a part stand for the whole; and instead of enumerating *all* the commandments, to specify only a few, which were to represent the rest. "Thou shalt do no murder, thou shalt not commit adultery, and so of all the other commandments, to which my reasoning equally applies." Nor does he only include in his injunction the ten commandments, but *all* the moral commandments of God contained in the law of Moses; for he mentions one which is not to be found in the ten commandments; "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." This therefore points out to the young man his obligation to observe all the other moral precepts of the law. "The young man saith unto him, all these things have I kept from my youth up; what lack I yet?" The probability is, that he flattered himself he lacked nothing; that his obedience to the moral law rendered him *perfect*, qualified him to become a disciple and follower of Christ here, and gave him a *claim* to a superior degree of felicity hereafter. It was to repress these imaginations, which Jesus saw rising in his mind, that he gave him the following answer; an answer which struck the young man with astonishment and grief, and which some have represented as more harsh and severe than his conduct merited. "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me." In the parallel place of St. Mark, it is, "Come and take up the cross and follow me." The meaning is, although God is pleased to accept graciously your obedience to the moral law,

yet you must not flatter yourself that your obedience is *perfect*; and that this perfect obedience gives you a *right* or *claim* to eternal life; much less to a superior degree of reward in heaven; far from it. To convince you how far you fall short of *perfection*, I will put your obedience to the test, in a trying instance, and you shall then judge whether you are so perfect as you suppose yourself. You say that you have from your youth kept the moral laws delivered to you by Moses. Now one of those laws is this, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy might." If therefore you pretend to perfection, you must observe this law as well as all the rest, and consequently you must prefer his favour to every thing else; you must be ready to sacrifice to his commands every thing that is most valuable to you in this world. I now, therefore, as a teacher sent from God, require you to sell all you have, and give to the poor, and follow me, and you shall then have treasure in heaven. The young man made no reply. He could not. He saw all his pretensions to *perfection*, his hopes of an *extraordinary* reward, vanish at once. He was not disposed to purchase even treasure in heaven at the price of all he possessed on earth. He therefore went away silent and sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

There is a question which I suppose naturally arises in every man's mind, on reading this conversation between the young ruler and Jesus. Does the injunction here given to the young man by Jesus, relate to *all* Christians in general? and are we all of us, without exception, bound to sell all that we have, and give to the poor, as a necessary condition of obtaining treasure in heaven? The answer is, most assuredly not.

Our Lord's command refers solely to the individual person to whom he addressed himself, or at the most to those who at that time became disciples of Christ. I have already shown that our Saviour's object in giving this command to the young man, was probably to lower the high opinion he seemed to entertain of his *perfect* obedience to the law of Moses, to convince him that he was very far from that exalted state of piety and virtue to which he pretended, and that if he was rewarded with eternal life, it must be not in consequence of his own righteousness, but of the mercy of God, and the merits of a Redeemer, as yet unknown to him.

But besides this, it is not improbable that the young ruler was ambitious to enlist under the banners of Christ, and to become one of his disciples and followers. And at that time no one could do this whose time and thoughts were engaged in worldly concerns, and in the care and management and attendant luxuries of a large fortune. Nor was this all; every man that embarked in so perilous an undertaking, did it at the risk not only of his property, but even of life itself, from the persecuting spirit of the Jewish rulers. When, therefore, our Saviour says to the young man, If thou wilt be *perfect*, that is, if thou art desirous to profess the more perfect religion of the gospel, and to become one of my followers, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and take up the cross and follow me; he only prepares him for the great hardships and dangers to which *every* follower of Christ was *then* exposed, and the necessity there was for him to sit loose to every thing most valuable in the present life.

This command, therefore, does not in its primary meaning relate to Christians of the present times; nor indeed to Christians at all, properly speaking, but

to those who were at *that time* desirous of becoming so.

But though in a strict and literal sense it cannot be applied to ourselves, yet in its principle and in its general import, it conveys a most useful and most important lesson to Christians in every age and in every nation; it is an admonition to them not to pique themselves too much on their exact obedience to all the divine commands, not to assume to themselves so much perfection, as to found upon it a *right* and a *claim* to eternal life; not to rely solely on their own righteousness, but on the merits of their Redeemer, for acceptance and salvation. It reminds them also, that they ought always to be prepared to yield an implicit obedience to the commands of their Maker; and that if their duty to him should at any time require it, they should not hesitate to renounce their dearest interests, and most favourite pleasures; to part with fame, with fortune, and even life itself; and, under all circumstances, to consider, in the first place, what it is that God requires at their hands, and to submit to it, whatever it may cost them, without a murmur.

After this conversation with the young ruler, follows the observation made by our Lord, on this remarkable incident. Then said Jesus unto his disciples, "Verily I say unto you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." When his disciples heard it they were amazed, saying, "Who then can be saved?" But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." This sentence passed upon the rich is a declaration, which, if understood literally, and as applying to *all* Christians

of the present day, who may justly be called *rich*, would be truly terrifying and alarming to a very large description of men, a much larger than may at first perhaps be imagined. For by rich men must be understood, not only those of high rank and large possessions, but those in every rank of life, who have any superfluity beyond what is necessary for the decent and comfortable support of themselves and their families. These are all to be considered as *rich* in a greater or less degree, and this of course must comprehend a very large part of the Christian world. Does then our Lord mean to say, that it is scarce possible for such vast numbers of Christians to be saved? This does certainly at the first view seem to be implied in that very strong expression, “that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven.” But it may fairly be presumed, that it was not our Lord’s intention to pronounce so very severe and discouraging a sentence as this, and to render the way to heaven almost inaccessible to so very considerable a number of his disciples. And in fact, on a careful consideration of this passage, of the limitations and abatements necessary to be made in proverbial expressions and oriental idioms, and of the explanations given of it in other parts of scripture, and even by our Lord himself, it will appear that there is nothing in it which ought to inspire terror and dismay into the heart of any sincere and real Christian, be his situation ever so exalted or affluent.

It must be observed then in the first place, what is exceedingly important in this inquiry, that, in its original application, this passage does not seem to have attached upon those who were then actually

disciples of Christ, but upon those only who were desirous of becoming so: for consider only the occasion which gave rise to this reflection. It was that very incident on which we have just been commenting; that of the young rich ruler whom our Saviour exhorted to sell all that he had, and take up his cross and follow him. The young man not relishing these conditions, instead of following Jesus, went away sorrowful, because he had great possessions. He therefore never was, as far as we know, a disciple of Christ; and it was upon this that Jesus immediately declared that “a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven;” that is, shall hardly be induced to embrace the Christian religion; for that is frequently the signification of the *kingdom of heaven*, in scripture. What then our Lord affirmed was this, that it was extremely difficult at that time, at the first preaching of the gospel, for any rich man to become a convert to Christianity. And this we may easily believe; for those who were enjoying all the comforts and elegancies and luxuries of life, would not be very ready to sacrifice these, and submit to poverty, hardships, persecutions, and even death itself, to which the first converts to Christianity were frequently exposed. They would therefore generally follow the example of the rich man before us; would turn their backs on the kingdom of heaven, and go away to the world and its enjoyments. And this in fact we know to have been the case. For it was of the lower ranks of men that our Lord’s disciples *principally* consisted, and we are expressly told that it was the common people chiefly that heard him gladly; and even after his death, St. Paul asserts, that not many mighty, not many noble, were called. It should seem

then, that the primary objects of this declaration were those rich men to whom the gospel was *then* offered, and of whom very few embraced it. And as no penal law ought to be stretched beyond its strict and literal sense, I do not conceive that we are *authorized* to apply this severe sentence to those opulent persons who now profess themselves Christians, and to say of them that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to inherit the rewards of heaven. Still, however, as the words themselves will perhaps bear such an application, it is not improbable that our Lord might have an eye to rich men in future professing Christianity, as well as to the rich men of those days, who were either Jews or Heathens. But if it *does* relate to rich Christians at all, I have no difficulty in saying, that it must be in a very qualified and mitigated sense of the words, such as shall not bar up the gates of heaven against any true believers in Christ, or inspire terror and despair, where friendly admonition was only meant.

The first thing then to be remarked is, that although the similitude here made use of, that of a camel passing through the eye of a needle, implies absolute impossibility, yet according to every rule of interpreting oriental proverbs (for such this is), it means only, in its application, *great difficulty*. And in this sense it was actually used both by the Jews and the Arabians; and is plainly so interpreted by our Lord, when he says that a rich man shall *hardly* enter into the kingdom of heaven.

But even in this sense the words do not apply to *all* rich men without distinction. For in the parallel place of St. Mark *, upon the disciples expressing their astonishment at our Lord's declaration, he immediately

* Mark x. 24.

explains himself by saying, How *hard* is it for them that *trust* in riches to enter into the kingdom of heaven: and it is *after* this explanation, that the proverbial passage follows, “ it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

We see then that those rich men only are meant, who *trust* in their riches, who place their whole *dependence* upon them; whose views and hopes are centered in them and them only; who place their whole happiness, not in relieving the distresses of the poor, and soothing the sorrows of the afflicted; not in acts of worship and adoration, and thanksgiving to Him from whose bounty they derive every blessing they enjoy; not in giving him their hearts, and dedicating their wealth to his glory and his service, but in amassing it without end, or squandering it without any benefit to mankind, in making it the instrument of pleasure, of luxury, of dissipation, of vice, and the means of gratifying every irregular appetite and passion without control. These are the rich men, whose salvation is represented by our Saviour to be almost impossible; and yet even with respect to these he adds, With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible; that is, although if we look to human means, to human strength alone, it seems utterly impossible that such men as these should ever repent and be saved; yet to the power of God, to the over-ruling influences of the Holy Spirit, nothing is impossible. His grace shed abroad in the heart may touch it with compunction and remorse, may awaken it to penitence, may heal all its corruptions, may illuminate, may purify, may sanctify it, may bring the most worldly-minded man

to a sense of his condition, and make him transfer his trust from riches to THE LIVING GOD.

It is then to those that *trust* in riches that this denunciation of our Lord peculiarly applies; but even to *all rich men in general* it holds out this most important admonition, that their situation is at the best a situation of difficulty and danger; that their riches furnish them with so many opportunities of indulging every wayward wish, every corrupt propensity of their hearts, and spread before them so many temptations, so many incitements, so many provocations to luxury, intemperance, sensuality, pride, forgetfulness of God, and contempt of every thing serious and sacred, that it is sometimes too much for human nature to bear; that they have therefore peculiar need to take heed to their ways, to watch incessantly over their own conduct, to keep their hearts with all diligence, to guard the issues of life and death, and above all, to implore with unceasing earnestness and fervour that help from above, those communications of divine grace, which can alone enable them, and which will effectually enable them, to overcome the world, and to vanquish all the powerful enemies they have to contend with. They have in short their way plainly marked out to them in scripture, and the clearest directions given them how they are to conduct themselves so as to become *partakers of everlasting life*. “ Charge them (says St. Paul) that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the

time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life*.”

This striking charge to the rich is pregnant with most important and wholesome counsel, and is an admirable comment on that very passage which has so long engaged our attention. It seems indeed to allude and refer to it, and points out all those distinctions which tend to explain away its seeming harshness, and ascertain its true spirit and meaning.

It cautions the rich men of the world not to *trust* in uncertain riches: the very expression made use of by our Lord, and the very circumstance which renders it so *hard* for them to enter into the kingdom of heaven. They are enjoined to place their trust in THE LIVING GOD. They are to be rich in a far brighter treasure than gold and silver, in faith and in good works; and if they are, they will “lay a good foundation against the time to come, and will *lay hold* on eternal life.” This entirely does away all the terror, all the dismay, which our Lord’s denunciation might tend to produce in the minds of the wealthy and the great: it proves that the way to heaven is as open to *them*, as to all other ranks and conditions of men, and it points out to them the very means by which they may arrive there. These means are, trust in the living God, dedication of themselves to his service and his glory, zeal in every good work, and more particularly the appropriation of a large part of that very wealth, which constitutes their danger, to the purposes of piety, charity, and beneficence. These are the steps by which they must, through the merits of their Redeemer, ascend to heaven. Those riches which are their natural enemies, must be converted into allies and friends. They must, as the scripture expresses it, make to themselves “friends of

* 1 Tim. vi. 17--19.

the mammon of unrighteousness* ;” they must be rich towards God ; they must turn that wealth, which is too often the cause of their perdition, into an instrument of salvation, into an *instrument* by which they may *lay hold*, as the apostle expresses it, on eternal life.

Before I quit this interesting passage, it may be of use to observe, that while it furnishes a lesson of great caution, vigilance, and circumspection to the rich, it affords also no small degree of consolation to the poor. If they are less bountifully provided than the rich, with the materials of happiness for the present life, let them however be thankful to Providence that they have fewer difficulties to contend with, fewer temptations to combat, and fewer obstacles to surmount, in their way to the life which is to come. They have fortunately no means of indulging themselves in that luxury and dissipation, those extravagancies and excesses, which sometimes disgrace the wealthy and the great ; and they are preserved from many follies, imprudencies, and sins, equally injurious to present comfort and future happiness. If they are destitute of all the elegancies, and many of the conveniencies and accommodations of life, they are also exempt from those cares and anxieties which frequently corrode the heart, and perhaps more than balance the enjoyments of their superiors. The inferiority of their condition secures them from all the dangers and all the torments of ambition and pride ; it produces in them generally that meekness and lowliness of mind, which is the chief constituent of a true evangelical temper, and one of the most essential qualifications for the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus having made these observations on the conduct

* Luke xvi. 9.

of the young ruler, who refused to part with his wealth and follow him, Peter thought this a fair opportunity of asking our Lord what reward should be given to him and the other apostles, who had actually done what the young ruler had not the courage and the virtue to do. Then answered Peter and said unto him, “Lo! *we* have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall *we* have therefore?” It is true the apostles had no wealth to relinquish, but what little they had they cheerfully parted with; they gave up their *all*, they took up their cross and followed Christ. Surely after such a sacrifice they might well be allowed to ask what recompense they might expect, and nothing can be more natural and affecting than their appeal to their divine Master: “Behold, *we* have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall *we* have therefore?” Our Lord felt the force and the justice of this appeal, and immediately gave them this most gracious and consolatory answer: “Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel: and every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundred fold, and shall inherit everlasting life.”

Our translators, by connecting the word *regeneration* with the preceding words, “ye which have followed me in the regeneration,” evidently supposed that word to relate to the first preaching of the gospel, when those who heard and received it were to be regenerated, or made new creatures.

But most of the ancient fathers, as well as the best modern commentators, refer that expression to the

words that follow it, “in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory;” by which is meant the day of judgement and of recompense, when all mankind shall be as it were regenerated or born again, by rising from their graves; and when, as St. Matthew tells us in the 27th chapter (making use of the very same phrase that he does here) the Son of man shall sit on the throne of his glory. At that solemn hour Jesus tells his apostles that they shall also sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. This is an allusion to the custom of princes having their great men ranged around them as assessors and advisers when they sit in council or in judgement; or more probably to the Jewish sanhedrim, in which the high priest sat surrounded by the principal rulers, chief priests, and doctors of the law; and it was meant only to express, in these figurative terms, that the apostles should in the kingdom of heaven have a distinguished pre-eminence of glory and reward, and a place of honour assigned them near the person of our Lord himself.

Jesus then goes on to say, “every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundred fold, and shall inherit everlasting life.” It is plain, both from the construction of this verse, and from the express words of St. Mark in the parallel passage, that the reward here promised to the apostles, whatever it might be, was to be bestowed in the *present world*; besides which they were to inherit everlasting life.

What then, it may be asked, is this recompense, which was to take place in the present life, and was to be a *hundred fold*? It certainly cannot be a hundred

fold of those worldly advantages which are supposed to be relinquished for the sake of Christ and his religion; for a multiplication of several of these things, instead of a reward, would have been an incumbrance. And we know in fact the apostles never did abound in worldly possessions, but were for the most part destitute and poor. The recompense then here promised must have been of a very different nature; it is that internal content and satisfaction of mind, that peace of God which passeth all understanding, those delights of a pure conscience and an upright heart, that affectionate support of all good men, those consolations of the Holy Spirit, that trust and confidence in God, that consciousness of the divine favour and approbation, those reviving hopes of everlasting glory, which every good man and sincere Christian never fails to experience in the discharge of his duty. These are the things which will cheer his heart and sustain his spirits, amidst all the discouragements he meets with, under the pressure of want, of poverty, affliction, of calumny, of ridicule, of persecution, and even under the terrors of death itself, which will recompense him *a hundred fold* for all the sacrifices he has made to Christ and his religion, and impart to him a degree of comfort, and tranquillity, and happiness, far beyond any thing that all the wealth and splendour of this world can bestow. That this is not a mere ideal representation, we may see in the example of those very persons to whom this discourse of our Saviour was addressed. We may see a picture of the felicity here described, drawn by the masterly hand of St. Paul, in his Second Epistle to the Corinthians: “ We are, says he, (speaking of himself and his fellow-labourers in the gospel) we are approving ourselves in much patience, in afflictions, in

necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings; by pureness, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." We have here a portrait, not merely of patience and fortitude, but of *cheerfulness and joy* under the acutest sufferings, which is nowhere to be met with in the writings of the most celebrated heathen philosophers. The utmost that *they* pretended to was a contempt of pain, a determination not to be subdued by it, and not even to acknowledge that it was an evil. But we never hear them expressing that cheerfulness and joy under suffering, which we here see in the apostles and first disciples of Christ. Indeed it was impossible that they should rise to these extraordinary exertions of the human mind, since they wanted all those supports which bore up the apostles under the severest calamities, and raised them above all the common weaknesses and infirmities of their nature; namely, the consciousness of being embarked in the greatest and noblest undertaking that ever engaged the mind of man, an unbounded trust and confidence in the protection of Heaven, a large participation of the divine influences and consolations of the Holy Spirit, and a firm and well-grounded hope of an eternal reward in another life, which would infinitely overpay all their labour and their sorrows in this.

These were the sources of that content and cheerfulness, that vigour and vivacity of mind, under the severest afflictions, which nothing could depress, and which nothing but Christian philosophy could produce.

Here then we have a full explanation of our Lord's promise in the passage before us, that every one who had forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for his name's sake, should receive a hundred fold, should receive abundant recompense in the comfort of their own minds, as described in the corresponding passage of St. Paul, just cited; which may be considered not only as an admirable comment on our Lord's declaration, but as an exact fulfilment of the prediction contained in it. For that declaration is plainly prophetic; it foretells the persecution his disciples would meet with in the discharge of their duty; and foretells also, that in the midst of these persecutions they would be undaunted and joyful. And there cannot be a more perfect completion of any prophecy, than that which St. Paul's description sets before us with respect to this.

But we must not confine this promise of our Saviour's to his own immediate followers and disciples; it extends to all his faithful servants in every age and nation of the world, that part with any thing which is dear and valuable to them for the sake of the gospel. Whoever has passed any time in the world, must have seen that every man who is sincere in the profession of his religion, who sets God always before him, and who seeks above all things his favour and approbation, must sometimes make great and painful sacrifices to the commands of his Maker and Redeemer; and whoever does so, whoever gives up his pleasures, his interests,

his fame, his favourite pursuits, his fondest wishes, and his strongest passions, for the sake of his duty, and in conformity to the will of his heavenly Father, may rest assured, that he shall in no wise lose his reward. He shall, in a degree proportioned to the self-denial he has exercised, and the sufferings he has undergone, experience the present comfort and support here promised to the apostles; and shall also, though not to the same extent, have an extraordinary recompense in the kingdom of heaven.

Let no one then be deterred from persevering in the path of duty, whatever discouragements, difficulties, or obstructions he may meet with in his progress, either from the struggles he has with his own corrupt affections, or from the malevolence of the world. Let him not fear to encounter what he must expect to meet with, opposition, contumely, contempt, and ridicule; let him not fear the enmity of profligate and unprincipled men; but let him go on undaunted and undismayed in that uniform tenour of piety and benevolence, of purity, integrity, and uprightness of conduct, which will not fail to bring him peace at the last. Let him not be surprised or alarmed if he is not exempt from the common lot of every sincere and zealous Christian; if he finds it by his own experience to be true, what an apostle of Christ had long since prepared him to expect, that whosoever will live godly in Christ Jesus shall in one way or other *suffer persecution*. But let him remember at the same time the reviving and consolatory declaration of his divine Master; "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven."

LECTURE XVIII.



MATTHEW XXII.

I NOW pass on to the twenty-second chapter of St. Matthew, in which our blessed Lord introduces the following parable :

“ The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding, and they would not come. Again he sent forth other servants, saying, tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready; come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise; and the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burnt up their city. Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they could find, both bad and good, and the wedding was furnished with guests.

And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment. And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having on a wedding garment? and he was speechless. Then said the king to his servants, Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth; for many are called, but few are chosen."

The primary and principal object of this parable is to represent, under the image of a marriage feast, the invitation given to the Jews to embrace the gospel, their rejection of that gracious offer, the severe punishment inflicted upon them for their ingratitude and obstinacy, and the admission of the Heathens to the privileges of Christianity in their room.

"The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son."

That is, the dispensations of the Almighty, with respect to the Christian religion which is called the kingdom of heaven, may be compared to the conduct of a certain king, who (as was the custom in those times, especially among the eastern nations) gave a splendid feast in consequence of his son's marriage. And in this comparison there is a peculiar propriety, because both the Jewish and the Christian covenant are frequently represented in scripture under the similitude of a marriage contract between God and his people*. "And he sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding, and they would not come. Again he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready; come unto the marriage." This

* See Isaiah liv. 5. Jeremiah iii. 8. Matt. xxv. 5. 2 Cor. xi. 2.

signifies the various and repeated offers of the gospel to the Jews; first by John the Baptist, then by our Saviour himself, then by his apostles and the seventy disciples, both before and after his ascension.

But all these gracious offers, the greater part of the nation rejected with scorn. They would not come to the marriage; they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise; and the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. They not only slighted and treated with contempt the words of eternal life, and preferred the pleasures and the interests of the present life to all the joys of heaven, but they pursued with unceasing rancour the first preachers of the gospel, and persecuted them even unto death.

“But when the King heard thereof, he was wroth; and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed these murderers, and burnt up their city.” This points out, in the plainest terms, the Roman armies under Vespasian and Titus, which, not many years after this was spoken, besieged Jerusalem, and destroyed the city, and slaughtered an immense number of the inhabitants. This terrible devastation our Lord here predicts in general terms, as he does more particularly and minutely in the twenty-fourth chapter; and he here represents it as the judgment of God on this perverse and obstinate people for their rejection of the Christian religion, their savage treatment of the apostles and their associates, and their many other atrocious crimes. This punishment however is here, by anticipation, represented as having been inflicted during the marriage feast; though it did not in fact take place till afterwards, till after the gospel had been for some time promulgated.

“Then said he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good; and the wedding was furnished with guests.”

It may be thought, perhaps, at the first view, that our Lord has here introduced a circumstance not very natural or probable. It may be imagined that at a magnificent royal entertainment, if any of the guests happened to fail in their attendance, a great king would never think of supplying their places by sending his servants into the highways to collect together all the travellers and strangers they could meet with, and make them sit down at the marriage feast. But strange as this may seem, there is something that approaches very near to it in the customs of the eastern nations, even in modern times. For a traveller of great credit and reputation, Dr. Poccoke, informs us, that an Arab prince will often dine in the street before his door, and call to all that pass, even to beggars, in the name of God, and they come and sit down to table; and when they have done, retire with the usual form of returning thanks*.

This adds one more proof to the many others I have already pointed out in the course of these Lectures, of the exact correspondence of the various facts and circumstances recorded in the sacred writings to the truth of history, and to ancient oriental customs and manners.

This part of the parable alludes to the calling in of the Gentiles or Heathens to the privileges of the gospel,

* Poccoke, vol. i. pp. 57 and 182. See also Diod. Sic. l. xiii. pp. 375, 376.

after they had been haughtily rejected by the Jews. This was first done by St. Peter, in the instance of Cornelius, and afterwards extended to the Gentiles at large by him and the other apostles, conformably to what our Lord declares in another place: “Many shall come from the east and from the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God; but the children of the kingdom (that is, the Jews) shall be shut out*.” And in this gracious invitation, no exceptions, no distinctions, were to be made. The servants gathered together *all* as many as they found, both *bad* and *good*; men of all characters and descriptions were to have the offers of mercy and salvation made to them, even the very worst of sinners; for it was these chiefly that our Saviour came to call to repentance; “for they that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick †:” and of these, great numbers did actually embrace the gracious offers made to them; for our Lord told the Jews, “the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you ‡.”

In this manner was the wedding furnished with guests. “And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment; and he said unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding garment? and he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth: for many are called, but few are chosen.”

In order to understand this part of the parable, it must be observed, that among the ancients, especially in the East, every one that came to a marriage feast

* Matt. viii. 11.

† Ib. ix. 12.

‡ Ib. xxi. 31.

was expected to appear in a handsome and elegant dress, which was called the WEDDING GARMENT. This was frequently a white robe; and where the guest was *a stranger*, or was not able to provide such a robe, it was usual for the master of the feast to furnish him with one; and if he who gave the entertainment was of high rank and great opulence, he sometimes provided marriage robes for the whole assembly. To this custom we have allusions in Homer, and other classic writers*; and there are some traces of it in the entertainments of the Turkish court at this very day†. It must be remarked also, that it was in a very high degree indecorous and offensive to good manners, to intrude into the festivity without this garment; hence the indignation of the king against the bold intruder who dared to appear at the marriage feast without the nuptial garment. “He was cast into outer darkness;” was driven away from the blaze and splendour of the gay apartments within, to the darkness and gloom of the street, where he was left to unavailing grief and remorse for the offence he had committed, and the enjoyments he had lost.

This man was meant to be the representative of those presumptuous persons who intrude themselves into the Christian covenant, and expect to receive all the privileges and all the rewards annexed to it, without possessing any one of those Christian graces and virtues which the gospel requires from all those who profess to believe and to embrace it. Nothing is more common in scripture than to represent the *habits* and *dispositions* of the mind, those which determine and

* Odyss. viii. 402. Diod. Sic. l. xiii. pp. 375, 376.

† At the entertainment given by the grand vizier to Lord Elgin and his suite, in the palace of the seraglio, pelisses were given to all the guests.

distinguish the whole character, under the figure of bodily garments and external habits. Thus Job says of himself, “I put on righteousness, and it clothed me: my judgement was as a robe and a diadem*.” And again in Isaiah it is said, “He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation; he hath covered me with a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with jewels †.” In the same manner we are commanded in the gospel to *put on* charity, to *be clothed* with humility; and in the book of Revelation ‡, the elders are described as sitting before the throne of God clothed in *white raiment*. And in the nineteenth chapter there is a passage, which is a clear and beautiful illustration of that now before us: “The marriage of the Lamb is come; and to her (that is, to the Church) was granted, that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white;” and this fine linen, we are expressly told, is the *righteousness of saints*. “And he saith unto me, Write, blessed are they which are called to the *marriage supper of the Lamb* ;” that is, of Christ the king §. This is a plain allusion to the parable before us; and most evidently shows, that the man without the wedding garment is every man that is not clothed with *the robe of righteousness*; every man that pretends to be a Christian, without possessing the true evangelical temper and disposition of mind, without the virtues of a holy life; every one that expects to be saved by Christ, yet regards not the conditions on which that salvation depends; every profane, every unjust, every dissolute man; every one, in short, that presumes to say, “Lord, Lord, yet doeth not the will of his Father

* Job xxix. 14.

† Isa. lxi. 10.

‡ Ch. iv. 4.

§ Rev. xix. 7, 8, 9.

which is in heaven*.” All these shall be excluded from the marriage feast, from the privileges of the gospel, and the joys of heaven, and shall be cast into outer darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth; for many, we are told, are called, but few are chosen; that is, many are *called upon* and *invited* to embrace the gospel; but few, comparatively speaking, receive it, or at least conduct themselves in a manner suitable to their high and heavenly calling, so as to be *chosen* or deemed worthy to inherit the kingdom of heaven.

I have only to observe farther on this parable, that although in its primary intention it relates solely to the Jews, yet it has, like many other of our Lord's parables, a secondary reference to persons of every denomination in every age and nation, who, through indolence, prejudice, vanity, pride, or vice, reject the Christian revelation; or who, professing to receive it, live in direct opposition to its doctrines and its precepts. The same future punishment which is denounced against the unbelieving or hypocritical Jews, will be with equal severity inflicted on *them*.

After Jesus had delivered this parable, the Pharisees, perceiving plainly that it was directed against them principally, were highly incensed, and determined to take their revenge, and endeavour to bring him into difficulty and danger by ensnaring questions. “Then went the Pharisees and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk. And they sent out unto him their disciples, with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth; neither carest thou for any man, for thou regardest not the person of men.

* Matt. vii. 21.

Tell us, therefore, what thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Cæsar, or not? But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? Show me the tribute-money; and they brought unto him a penny. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? They say unto him, Cæsar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and unto God the things which are God's. When they heard these words, they marvelled, and left him, and went their way." In order to understand the insidious nature of the question here proposed to Jesus, it must be observed, that the Jews were at this time, as they had been for many years, under the dominion of the Romans; and as an acknowledgement of their subjection, paid them an annual tribute in money. The Pharisees however were adverse to the payment of this tribute; and contended, that being the peculiar people of God, and he their only rightful sovereign, they ought not to pay tribute to any foreign prince whatever; they considered themselves as subjects of the Almighty, and released from all obedience to any foreign power. There were many others who maintained a contrary opinion, and it was a question much agitated among different parties. Who the Herodians were that accompanied the Pharisees, and what their sentiments were on this subject, is very doubtful: nor is it a matter of any moment. It is plain from their name that they were in some way or other attached to Herod: and as he was a friend to the Roman government, they probably maintained the propriety of paying the tribute.*

* Those whom St. Mark calls the *Leaven of Herod*, c. viii. 15. St. Matthew, in the parallel passage, xvi. 5. calls Sadducees. Hence, perhaps, we may infer, that the Herodians and the Sadducees were the same persons.

In this state of things both the Pharisees and Herodians came to Jesus, and after some flattering and hypocritical compliments to his love of truth, his intrepidity, impartiality, and disregard to power and greatness (calculated evidently to spirit him up to some bold and offensive declaration of his opinion) they put this question to him; "Is it lawful to give tribute to Cæsar, or not?" They were persuaded, that in answering this question, he must either render himself odious to the Jewish people, by opposing their popular notions of liberty, and appearing to pay court to the emperor; or, on the other hand, give offence to that prince, and expose himself to the charge of sedition and disaffection to the Roman government, by denying their right to the tribute they had imposed. They conceived it impossible for him to extricate himself from this dilemma, or to escape danger on one side or the other; and perhaps no other person but himself could have eluded the snare that was laid for him. But he did it completely; and showed on this occasion, as he had done on many others, that presence of mind and readiness of reply to difficult unexpected questions, which is one of the strongest proofs of superior wisdom, of a quick discernment, and a prompt decision. He pursued, in short, the method which he had adopted in similar instances; he compelled the Jews in effect to answer the question themselves, and to take from him all the odium attending the determination of it. He perceived their wickedness, and said, "Why tempt ye me? Why do you try to ensnare me, ye hypocrites? Shew me the tribute-money. And they brought unto him a penny (a small silver coin of the Romans, called a denarius). And he said unto them, Whose is this image and super-

scription? And they say unto him, Cæsar's." By admitting that this was Cæsar's coin, and by consenting to receive it as the current coin of their country, they in fact acknowledged their subjection to his government. For the right of coinage, and of issuing the coin, and giving value and currency to it, is one of the highest prerogatives and most decisive marks of sovereignty: and it was a tradition of their own rabbins, that to admit the impression and the inscription of any prince on their current coin, was an acknowledgment of their subjection to him. And it was more particularly so in the present instance, because we are told that the denarius paid by the Jews as tribute-money had an inscription round the head of Cæsar, to this effect; *Cæsar Augustus, Judæa being subdued**. To pay this coin with this inscription, was the completest acknowledgment of subjection, and of course of their obligation to pay the tribute demanded of them, that could be imagined. Our Lord's decision therefore was a necessary consequence of their own concession. "Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's (which you yourselves acknowledge to be Cæsar's) and unto God the things that are God's. And when they heard these words, they marvelled; they were astonished at his prudence and address; and left him, and went their way."

But in this answer of our Saviour is contained a much stronger proof of his consummate wisdom and discretion than has yet been mentioned. He not only disengaged himself from the difficulties in which the question was meant to involve him, but, without entering into any political discussions, he laid down two doctrines of the very last importance to the peace and

* See Hammond, in loc.

happiness of mankind, and the stability of civil government. He made a clear distinction between the duties we owe to God, and the duties we owe to our earthly rulers. He showed that they did not, in the smallest degree, interfere or clash with each other; and that we ought never to refuse what is justly due to Cæsar, under pretence of its being inconsistent with what we owe to our Maker.

On the contrary, he lays down this as a general fundamental rule of his religion, that we ought to pay obedience to LAWFUL AUTHORITY, and submit to that acknowledged and established government under which we live. The Jews had for a hundred years acknowledged their subjection, and paid their tribute to the Roman government; and our Lord's decision therefore was, "Render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's." It is true that the tyrant Tiberius was then emperor of Rome, but the Jews alleged no particular grievance or act of oppression to justify their refusal of tribute; and our Lord had no concern with any peculiar form of government. His decision would have been the same had the Roman republic then existed. His doctrine was obedience to lawful authority, in whatever shape that authority might be exercised. If it be contended that there may be extraordinary cases of extreme and intolerable tyranny, which burst asunder at once the bonds of civil subordination, and justify resistance; the answer is, that these were considerations into which the divine Founder of our religion did not think it wise or expedient to enter. He left them to be decided (as they always must be) at the moment, by the pressing exigencies and peculiar circumstances of the case, operating on the common feelings and common sense of mankind. His great object was to lay

down one broad fundamental rule, which, considered as a general and leading principle, would be most conducive to the peace, the comfort, and the security of mankind; and that rule most indisputably is the very doctrine which he inculcated: OBEEDIENCE TO LAWFUL AUTHORITY AND ESTABLISHED GOVERNMENT. In perfect conformity to his sentiments, the apostles held the same language after his death. “Submit yourselves, says St. Peter, to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake; whether it be unto the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well*.” “Be subject to principalities and powers, says St. Paul, and *obey magistrates*†. Ye must needs be subject not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake‡. Render therefore to all, their dues, tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour§.” Here then we see the whole weight of the gospel and of its divine author, thrown into the scale of lawful authority. Here we see that the Christian religion comes in as a most powerful auxiliary to the civil magistrate, and lends the entire force of its sanctions to the established government of every country; an advantage of infinite importance to the peace and welfare of society. And happy had it been for mankind, if in this, as in every other instance, they had conformed to the directions of the gospel, instead of indulging their own wild projects and destructive theories of resistance to civil government, and the subversion of the most ancient and venerable institutions. Happy had it been for the Jews in particular, if they had adopted

* 1 Peter ii. 13, 14.

† Tit. iii. i.

‡ Rom. xiii. 5.

§ Rom. xiii. 7.

our Saviour's advice; for by acting contrary to it, by breaking out as they did soon after into open rebellion against the Romans, they plunged themselves into a most cruel and sanguinary war, which ended in the entire overthrow of their city, their temple, and their government, and the destruction of vast multitudes of the people themselves. Similar calamities have, we know, in other countries, arisen from similar causes; from a contempt of all legitimate authority, and a direct opposition to those sage and salutary precepts of the gospel, which are no less calculated to preserve the peace, tranquillity, security, and good order of civil society, than to promote the individual happiness of every human being, here and for ever.

The Pharisees having been thus completely foiled in their attempt to ensnare and entangle our Saviour in his talk, the next attempt made upon him was by a different set of men, the Sadducees, who disbelieved a resurrection, a future state, and the existence of the soul after death. And their object was to show the absurdity and the falsehood of these doctrines, by stating a difficulty respecting them, which they conceived to be insuperable. The difficulty was this: "The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked him, saying, Master, Moses said, if a man die having no children, his brothers shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and having no issue, left his wife unto his brother: likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh: and last of all the women died also: therefore in the resurrection, whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her. Jesus answered and said

unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures nor the power of God; for in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels in heaven. But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.”

This answer of our Saviour's has by some been thought to be obscure, and not to go directly to the point of proving a resurrection, which the Sadducees denied, and which their objection was meant to overthrow. In our Lord's reply no argument seems to be advanced, nor any plain text of scripture produced to establish the doctrine of a resurrection of the body, and its reanimation by the soul. It is only contended, that as God declares himself to be the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the souls of those persons must still be in existence in a separate state; because God could not be said to be the God of those who were no longer in being. This is undeniable. But how (it is said) does this prove a resurrection? To explain this, it must be observed, that Christ's answer consists of two parts: in the first, he solves the difficulty started by the Sadducees respecting a resurrection, by telling them that it arose entirely from their not attending to the power of God, which could effect with the utmost ease what to them appeared impossible; and from their ignorance of the state of human beings in heaven, which resembled that of angels, and required not a constant succession to be kept up by marriage. The case therefore they had stated respecting the marriage of the seven brethren with one woman was a very unfortunate one, because it happened that in heaven

there would be no such thing as marriage; which destroyed at once the whole of that objection which they deemed so formidable. In the second part he completely subverts the false principle on which their disbelief of a resurrection and a future state was entirely founded. This principle was, that the soul had no separate existence, but fell into nothing at the dissolution of its union with the body. This we learn from the Acts of the Apostles*, where it is said “that the Sadducees believe neither angel nor spirit;” and from Josephus, who tells us, that the Sadducees held that the soul *vanishes* (as he expresses it) with the body, and rejected the doctrine of its duration after death †. It was this principle therefore which our Saviour undertook to overthrow, which he does effectually in the 31st and 32d verses, by showing it to be a clear inference from the words of scripture ‡, that although the bodies of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, had long been in their graves, yet their souls had survived, and were at that moment in existence. From hence it necessarily followed that the soul did not perish with the body, as the Sadducees believed, but that it continued in being after death; and at the general resurrection would be again united with the body, and live for ever in a future state of happiness or of misery.

But though arguments may be confuted, and absurdities exposed, the thorough-paced caviller is not easily silenced. One should have thought that the disgraceful failure of so many attempts to surprise and ensnare Jesus, would have taught his adversaries

* Chap. xxiii. 3.

† Συναφανίζει τοις σωμασι. Antiq. l. xviii. c. 2. p. 793. Ed. Huds.

‡ Exod. iii. 6.

a little modesty and a little prudence; but these are qualities with which professed disputers and sophists do not usually much abound. When therefore the Pharisees had heard that Jesus had put the Sadducees to silence, instead of being discouraged from making any more experiments of that nature, *they were gathered together*, probably to consult how they might renew their attacks upon him with more success. Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, “Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

The question here proposed to Jesus by the lawyer, or interpreter of the Mosaic law, took its rise probably from a maxim, which seems to have been received among the Scribes and Pharisees as a first principle, namely, that such a multiplicity of precepts as the law contained was too great for any one to observe; and therefore all that could be required was, that each should select to himself one or two great and important duties, on account of which, if inviolably observed, his transgressions in other respects would be overlooked. But then immediately arose a question, Which *were* these great and important duties that ought to have the preference to all the rest, and on which they might securely ground all their merit and all their pretences to the favour of God? And on this question a variety of sects were formed, under their respective leaders, who disputed about the *chief duty* much in the same

manner as the ancient pagan philosophers did about the *chief good*; and exactly with the same benefit to themselves and to the world.

It was with a reference therefore to these disputes, which were so warmly agitated among the Pharisees, that the lawyer asked our Lord, “which was the great commandment of the law?” Our Saviour’s answer was, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment.” He decided therefore immediately in favour of the moral law, and yet with his usual prudence did not neglect the ceremonial: for this very commandment of *the love of God* was written upon their phylacteries.

This, then, being declared by our Saviour himself to be the *first* of the commandments, must be considered by every Christian as standing at the head of the evangelical code of laws which he is bound to obey, and as entitled therefore to his first and highest regard. He is to love the Lord his God “with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his mind:” and the chief test by which the gospel orders us to try and measure our love to God is, the regard we pay to his commands. “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, says our Lord, he it is that loveth me*.” St. John in still stronger terms assures us, that “whoso keepeth God’s word, in him verily is the love of God *perfected* †.” The love of our Maker, then, is neither a mere unmeaning animal fervour, nor a lifeless, formal worship or obedience. It consists in devoutness of heart as well as purity of life: and from comparing together the different passages of scripture relating to it, we may define it to be such

* John xiv. 21.

† 1 John ii. 5.

a reverential admiration of God's perfections in general, and such a grateful sense of his infinite goodness in particular, as render the contemplation and the worship of him delightful to us, and produce in us a constant desire and endeavour to please him in every part of our moral and religious conduct.

This is, in a few words, what the scriptures mean by the love of God, and what our Lord here calls the FIRST AND GREAT COMMANDMENT. It is justly so called for various reasons: because he who is the object of it is the first and greatest of all beings, and therefore the duties owing to him must have the precedence and pre-eminence over every other; because it is the grand leading principle of right conduct, the original source and fountain from which all Christian graces flow, from whence the living waters of religion take their rise, and branch out into all the various duties of human life: because, in fine, it is, when fervent and sincere, the grand master-spring of human conduct; the only motive sufficiently powerful to subdue our strongest passions, to carry us triumphantly through the severest trials, and render us superior to the most formidable temptations.

Next to this in order and in excellence, or, as our Saviour expresses it, *like* unto it, is that other divine command, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

By the word neighbour is here to be understood, every man with whom we have any concern; every one who stands in need of our kindness, and to whom we are able to extend it: which includes not only our relations, friends, and countrymen, but even our enemies; as appears from the parable of the good Samaritan. The precept therefore requires us *generally* to love our fellow creatures as we do ourselves.

To this it has been objected, that the precept is impracticable and impossible. Self-love, it is contended, is a passion implanted in our breasts by the hand of God himself; and though social love is also another affection which he has given us, yet there is no comparison between the strength of the two principles; and no man can or does love all mankind as well as he does himself. It is perfectly true; nor does the precept before us require it. The words are not, thou shalt love thy neighbour *as much as thyself*; but thou shalt love thy neighbour *as thyself*, that is, thou shalt entertain for him an affection similar in *kind*, though not equal in *degree*, to that which thou entertainest for thyself. Our self-love prompts us to seek our own happiness, as far as is consistent with the duties we owe to God and to man. Our social love should in the same manner prompt us to seek the happiness of our neighbour, as far as is consistent with the duty we owe to God and ourselves. But in all *equal* circumstances our love for ourselves must have a priority in *degree* to the love we have for our neighbour. If, for instance, my neighbour is in extreme want of food, and I am in the same want, I am not bound to give him that food which is indispensably necessary for my own preservation, but that only which is consistent with it. The rule, in short, can never be mistaken by any man of common sense. Our business is to take care to carry it far enough: nature will take sufficient care that we do not carry it too far. It is in fact nothing more than what we are taught by another divine rule very nearly allied to this, and which all men allow to be reasonable, equitable, and practicable; “whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them*.”

* Matt. vii. 12.

This is precisely what is meant by loving our neighbour as ourselves: for when we treat him exactly as we would expect and hope to be treated by him in the same circumstances, we give a clear and decisive proof that we love him *as* ourselves. And in this there is evidently no impossibility, no difficulty, no obscurity.

These then are the two great commandments, on which we are told *hang all the law and the prophets*; that is, on them, as on its main foundation, rests the whole Mosaic dispensation; for of *that*, not of the gospel, our Lord is here speaking. To explain, establish, and confirm these two leading principles of human duty, was one of the chief objects of the law and the prophets. But it must at the same time be remembered (as I have shown at large in a former Lecture *) that, great and important as these two precepts confessedly are, they do by no means constitute the whole of the *Christian system*. In that we find many essential improvements of the moral law, which was carried by our Saviour to a much higher degree of perfection than in the Jewish dispensation, as may be seen more particularly in his sermon on the Mount. We find also in the New Testament all those important evangelical doctrines which distinguish the Christian revelation; more particularly those of a resurrection, of a future day of retribution, of the expiation of our sins, original and personal, by the sacrifice of Christ, of sanctification by the Holy Spirit, of justification by a true and lively faith in the merits of our Redeemer. If therefore we wish to form a just and correct idea of the whole Christian dispensation, and if we wish to be considered as genuine disciples of our divine Master, we must not content ourselves

* Lect. vii. pp. 125, 126.

with observing only the two leading commandments of love to God and love to men, but we must look to the *whole* of our religion as it lies in the gospel; we must endeavour to stand perfect in *all* the will of God, and in *all* the doctrines of his Son, as declared in the Christian revelation; and after doing our utmost to fulfil all righteousness, and to attend to every branch of our duty, both with respect to God, our neighbour, and ourselves, we must finally repose all our hopes of salvation on the merits of our Redeemer, and on our belief in him as the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

I must now put a period to these Lectures for the present season; and if it should please God to preserve my life for another year, I hope to finish my observations on the Gospel of St. Matthew; beyond which I must not now extend my views.

In the meanwhile, from what I have observed in the progress of these Lectures, I cannot help indulging an humble hope that they have not been unattended with some salutary effects upon your minds. But, when on the other hand, I consider that the time of year is now approaching, in which the gaieties and amusements of this vast metropolis are generally engaged in, with incredible alacrity and ardour, and multitudes are pouring in from every part of the kingdom to take their share in them; and when I recollect farther, that at this very period in the last year a degree of extravagance and wildness in pleasure took place, which gave pain to every serious mind, and was almost unexampled in any former times; I am not, I confess, without some apprehensions, that the same scene of levity and dissipation may again recur; and that some of those who now hear me (of the younger part more especially) may be drawn too far into this fashionable

vortex, and lose, in that giddy tumult of diversion, all remembrance of what has passed in this sacred place. I must therefore most earnestly caution them against these fascinating allurements, and recommend to them that moderation, that temperance, that modesty in amusement, which their Christian profession at all times requires; and for which at this moment there are reasons of peculiar weight and force*.

To indulge ourselves in endless gaieties and expensive luxuries, at a time when so many of our poorer brethren are, from the heavy pressure of unfavourable circumstances, in want of the most essential necessaries of life, would surely manifest a very unfeeling and unchristian disposition in ourselves, and would be a most cruel and wanton aggravation of their sufferings.

It is true, indeed, that their wants have hitherto been relieved with a liberality and kindness, which reflect the highest honour on those who exercised them. But the evil in question still subsists in its full force, and is, I fear, more likely to increase than to abate for months to come, and will of course require unceasing exertions of benevolence, and repeated acts of charity on our part, to alleviate and mitigate its baneful effects.

Every one ought therefore to provide as ample a fund as possible for this purpose; and how can this be better provided than by a retrenchment of our expensive diversions, our splendid assemblies, and luxurious entertainments? We are not *now* required, as the young ruler in the gospel was, to sell all we have, and give to the poor; but we are required, especially in

* This Lecture was given in April 1800, a time of great scarcity and extreme dearness of all the necessaries of life.

times such as these, to cut off all idle and needless articles of profusion, that we “ may have to give to him that needeth.”

And when we consider that the expense of a single evening’s amusement, or a single convivial meeting, would give support and comfort perhaps to twenty wretched families, pining in hunger, in sickness, and in sorrow, can we so far divest ourselves of all the tender feelings of our nature (not to mention any higher principle), can we be so intolerably selfish, so wedded to pleasure, so devoted to our own gratification, as to let the lowest of our brethren perish while we are solacing ourselves with every earthly delight? No one that gives himself leave to reflect for a moment, can think this to be right, can maintain it to be consistent with his duty either to God or man. And, even in respect to the very object we so eagerly pursue, and are so anxious to obtain, in point even of pleasure, I mean, and self-gratification, I doubt much whether the giddiest votary of amusement can receive half the real satisfaction from the gayest scenes of dissipation he is immersed in, that he would experience (if he would but try) from rescuing a fellow-creature from destruction, and lighting up an afflicted and fallen countenance with joy.

Let us then abridge ourselves of a few indulgences, and give the price of what they would cost us to those who have none. By this laudable species of economy, we shall at once improve ourselves in a habit of self-denial and self-government; we shall demonstrate the sincerity of our love to our fellow-creatures, by giving up *something* that is dear to us for their sake, by sacrificing our pleasures to their necessities; and, above all, we shall approve ourselves as faithful servants in

the sight of our Almighty Sovereign; we shall give some proof of our gratitude to our heavenly benefactor and friend, who has given us richly all things to enjoy; and who, in return for that bounty, expects and commands us to be rich in good works, to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to comfort the sick, to visit the fatherless and widow in their affliction, and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world, unpolluted by its vices, and unsubdued by its predominant vanities and follies.

LECTURE XIX.

MATTHEW XXIV.

THIS course of Lectures for the present year will begin with the twenty-fourth chapter of St. Matthew; which contains one of the clearest and most important prophecies that is to be found in the sacred writings.

The prophecy is that which our blessed Lord delivered respecting the destruction of Jerusalem, to which, I apprehend, the whole of the chapter, in its *primary* acceptation, relates. At the same time it must be admitted, that the forms of expression, and the images made use of, are for the most part applicable also to the day of judgement; and that an allusion to that great event, as a kind of secondary object, runs through almost every part of the prophecy. This is a very common practice in the prophetic writings, where two subjects are frequently carried on together, a principal and a subordinate one. In Isaiah there are no less than three subjects, the restoration of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity, the call of the Gentiles to the Christian covenant, and the redemption of mankind by the Messiah, which are frequently adumbrated under the same figures and images, and are so blended and interwoven together, that it is extremely difficult to separate them from each other*. In the same

* Bishop Lowth, on Isaiah, lii. 13.

manner our Saviour, in the chapter before us, seems to hold out the destruction of Jerusalem, which is his principal subject, as a type of the dissolution of the world, which is the under-part of the representation. By thus judiciously mingling together these two important catastrophes, he gives at the same time (as he does in many other instances) a most interesting admonition to his immediate hearers the Jews, and a most awful lesson to all his future disciples; and the benefit of his predictions, instead of being confined to one occasion, or to one people, is by this admirable management extended to every subsequent period of time, and to the whole Christian world.

After this general remark, which is a sort of key to the whole prophecy, and will afford an easy solution to several difficulties that occur in it, I shall proceed to consider distinctly the most material parts of it.

We are told in the first verse of this chapter, that “on our Saviour’s departing from the temple, his disciples came to him to show him the buildings of it;” that is, to draw his attention to the magnitude, the splendour, the apparent solidity and stability of that magnificent structure. It is observable that they advert particularly to the *stones* of which it was composed. In St. Mark their expression is, “See what manner of *stones*, and what buildings are here;” and in St. Luke they speak of the *goodly stones and gifts* with which it was adorned. This seems, at the first view, a circumstance of little importance; but it shows in a very strong light with what perfect fidelity and minute accuracy every thing is described in the sacred writings. For it appears from the historian Josephus, that there was scarce any thing more remarkable in this celebrated temple than the stupendous size of

the stones with which it was constructed. Those employed in the foundations were forty cubits, that is, above sixty feet in length; and the superstructure, as the same historian observes, was worthy of such foundations, for there were stones in it of the whitest marble, upwards of sixty-seven feet long, more than seven feet high, and nine broad*.

It was therefore not without reason that the disciples particularly noticed the uncommon magnitude of the stones of this superb temple, from which, and from the general solidity and strength of the building, they probably flattered themselves and meant to insinuate to their divine Master, that this unrivalled edifice was built for eternity, was formed to stand the shock of ages, and to resist the utmost efforts of human power to destroy it. How astonished then and dismayed must they have been at our Saviour's answer to these triumphant observations of theirs! Jesus said unto them. "See ye not all those things? Verily I say unto you, there shall not be left here one *stone* upon another that shall not be thrown down." This is a proverbial expression, used on other occasions to denote *entire destruction*; and therefore had the temple been reduced to ruins in the usual way, the prophecy would have been fully accomplished. But it so happened that this prediction was almost *literally* fulfilled, and that in reality scarce one stone was left upon another. For when the Romans had taken Jerusalem, Titus ordered his soldiers to dig up the foundations both of the city and the temple†. The Jewish writers also themselves acknowledge, that Terentius Rufus, who was left to command the army, did with a

* Josephus de Bello Jud. l. x. c. 5.

† Josephus de Bello Jud. l. vii. c. i. p. 170. B.

ploughshare tear up the foundations of the temple* ; and thereby fulfilled that prophecy of Micah †, “Therefore shall Zion for your sake be ploughed as a field.” And in confirmation of this remarkable circumstance, Eusebius also assures us, that the temple was ploughed up by the Romans ; and that he himself saw it lying in ruins ‡. The evangelist next informs us, that as Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives, which was exactly opposite to the hill on which the temple was built, and commanded a very fine view of it from the east, his disciples came unto him privately, saying, “Tell us when shall these things be, and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?” The expressions here made use of, *the sign of thy coming*, and *the end of the world*, at the first view naturally lead our thoughts to the coming of Christ at the day of judgement, and the final dissolution of this earthly globe. But a due attention to the parallel passages in St. Mark and St. Luke, and a critical examination into the real import of those two phrases in various parts of scripture, will soon convince a careful inquirer, that by *the coming of Christ* is here meant, not his coming to judge the world at the last day, but his coming to execute judgement upon Jerusalem § ; and that by *the end of the world* is to be understood, not the final consummation of all things here below, but the end of *that age*, the end of the Jewish state and polity, the subversion of their city, temple, and government ||.

The real questions therefore here put to our Lord by the disciples were these two :

* See Whitby, in loc. † Chap. iii. 12. ‡ Euseb. Dem. Evang. l. vi. 13.

§ See Mark xiii 4. Luke xxi. 7. Matt. xxiv. 4. 5 ; xvi. 28. John xxi. 22.

|| The word *αιων* (here translated the world) frequently means nothing more than *an age*, a certain definite period of time. See Matt. xxiv. 6. 14. Mark xiii. 7. Luke xxi. 9. compared with ver. 20. Hebrews ix. 26.

1st. At what time the destruction of Jerusalem was to take place; “Tell us when shall these things be?”

2dly. What the signs were that were to precede it; “What shall be the sign of thy coming?”

Our Lord in his answer begins first with the *signs*, of which he treats from the 4th to the 31st verse inclusive.

The first of these *signs* is specified in the 5th verse, “Many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.”

This part of the prophecy began soon to be fulfilled; for we learn from the ancient writers, and particularly from Josephus, that not long after our Lord’s ascension, several impostors appeared, some pretending to be the Messiah, and others to foretell future events. The first were those whom our Lord here says *should come in his name*, and were therefore *false Christs*. The others are alluded to in the eleventh verse, under the name of *false prophets*: “Many false prophets shall arise, and shall deceive many.” Of the first sort were, as Origen informs us*, one Dositheus, who said that he was the Christ foretold by Moses; and Simon Magus, who said he appeared among the Jews as the Son of God; besides several others alluded to by Josephus†.

The same historian tells us, that there were many *false prophets*, particularly an Egyptian, who collected together above thirty thousand Jews, whom he had deceived ‡; and Theudas, a magician, who said he was a prophet, and deceived many; and a multitude of others, who deluded the people, even to the last, with a promise of help from God. And in the reign of Nero, when Felix was procurator of Judæa, such a

* Origen: Adv. Cels. l. 1. & 6.

† De Bell. Jud. l. i. p. 705.

‡ Jos. Antiq. l. vx. c. 6. and c. 4. s. 1. Ed. Huds.

number of these impostors made their appearance, that many of them were seized and put to death every day*.

The next signs pointed out by our Lord are these that follow: “Ye shall hear of wars, and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet: for nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places: all these are the beginning of sorrows.”

That there were in reality great disturbances and commotions in those times, that there were not only rumours of wars, but wars actually existing, and continued dissensions, insurrections, and massacres among the Jews, and other nations who dwelt in the same cities with them, is so fully attested by all the historians of that period, but more particularly by Josephus, that to produce all the dreadful events of that kind which he enumerates, would be to transcribe a great part of his history. It is equally certain, from the testimony of the same author, as well as from Eusebius, and several profane historians, that there were famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes in divers places. It is added in the parallel place by St. Luke†, “that fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven.” And accordingly Josephus, in the preface of his history of the Jewish war, and in the history itself, enumerates a great variety of astonishing signs and prodigies, which he says preceded the calamities that impended over the Jews, and which he expressly affirms, in perfect conformity to our Saviour’s prediction, were signs manifestly in-

* Jos. Antiq. l. xx. c. 7. s. 5. p. 892.

† Luke xxi. 11.

tended to forebode their approaching destruction*. And these accounts are confirmed by the Roman historian Tacitus, who says that many prodigies happened at that time; armies appeared to be engaging in the sky, arms were seen glittering in the air, the temple was illuminated with flames issuing from the clouds, the doors of the temple suddenly burst open, and a voice more than human was heard, “that the gods were departing;” and soon after a great motion, as if they *were* departing †.

The sign next specified by our Saviour, in the ninth and the four following verses, relates to the disciples themselves: “Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you, and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name’s sake.” The parallel passages in St. Luke and St. Mark are still stronger, and more particular. St. Mark says, “They shall deliver you up to the councils; and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten: and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them ‡.” St. Luke’s words are, “They shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name’s sake §.” That every circumstance here mentioned was minutely and exactly verified in the sufferings of the apostles and disciples after our Lord’s decease, must be perfectly well known to every one that has read the Acts of the Apostles. You will there see that the lives of the apostles were one continued scene of persecution, affliction, and distress of every kind: that they were

* Jos. Procem. sect. 11. p. 957. De Bell. Jud. l. vi. c. 5. s. 3. p. 1281-2. & l. vii. c. 30.

† Tacitus, l. v. p. 25. Ed. Lips.

‡ Mark xiii. 9.

§ Luke xxi. 12.

imprisoned, were beaten, were brought before councils and sanhedrims, and kings; were many of them put to death, and were hated of all nations, by the heathens as well as by the Jews, for the sake of Christ; that is, for being called by his name. The very *name* of a Christian was a crime; and it exposed them to every species of insult, indignity, and cruelty.

To all these calamities was to be added another, which we find in the tenth verse: “Then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another.” The meaning is, that many Christians, terrified with these persecutions, shall become apostates from their religion, and renounce their faith; for that is the meaning generally of the word *offend* in the New Testament. That this would sometimes happen under such trials and calamities as the first Christians were exposed to, we may easily believe: and St. Paul particularly mentions a few who turned away from him, and forsook him; namely, Phygellus, Hermogenes, and Demas*. The other circumstance here predicted, “that the disciples should betray one another,” is remarkably verified by the testimony of the Roman historian Tacitus, who, in describing the persecution under Nero, tells us, “that several Christians were first apprehended, and then, *by their discovery*, a multitude of others were convicted, and cruelly put to death with derision and insult†.”

It is a natural consequence of all this, that the ardour of many in embracing and professing Christianity should be considerably abated, or, as it is expressed in the twelfth verse, *that the love of many should wax cold*; and of this we find several instances mentioned by the sacred writers ‡.

* 2 Tim. i. 15. iv. 10. † Tac. Ann. l. xv. ‡ 2 Tim. iv. 16. Heb. x. 25.

“ But he that shall endure unto the end, (adds our Lord in the thirteenth verse) the same shall be saved.” He that shall not be dismayed by these persecutions, but shall continue firm in his faith, and unshaken in his duty to the last, shall be saved, both in this world and the next. It is, we know, the uniform doctrine of scripture, that they who persevere in the belief and the practice of Christianity to the end of their lives, shall, through the merits of their Redeemer, be rewarded with everlasting life. And with respect to the present life, and the times to which our Saviour here alludes, it is remarkable, that none of his disciples were known to perish in the siege and destruction of Jerusalem.

Another sign which was to precede the demolition of the temple and the city of Jerusalem, was, that the Christian religion was first to be propagated over the greater part of the Roman empire, which, in the scripture, as well as by the Roman writers, was called *the world*. “ This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.” Then shall come what is called in the third verse, the *end of the world*; that is, the *Jewish world*, the Jewish state and government.

And accordingly St. Paul, in his epistle to the Colossians, speaks of the gospel “ being come unto all the world, and preached to every creature under heaven*.” And we learn from the most authentic writers, and the most ancient records, that the gospel was preached within thirty years after the death of Christ, in Idumæa, Syria, and Mesopotamia; in Media and Parthia, and many parts of Asia Minor; in Egypt, Mauritania, Ethiopia, and other regions of Africa; in

* Col. i. 6. 23.

Greece and Italy; as far north as Scythia, and as far westward as Spain, and in this very island which we inhabit; where there is great reason to believe Christianity was planted in the days of the apostles, and before the destruction of Jerusalem. And this, it is said, was to be, “for a testimony against them;” that is, against the Jews; for a testimony that the offer of salvation was made to them in every part of the world where they were dispersed; and that, by their obstinate rejection of it, they had merited the signal punishment which soon after overtook them.

Our Lord then goes on to still more alarming and more evident indications of the near approach of danger to the Jewish nation. “When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet*, stand in the holy place, (let him that readeth understand); then let them that be in Judæa flee into the mountain.” The meaning of this passage is clearly and fully explained by the parallel place in St. Luke: “when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh.” The *abomination of desolation* therefore denotes the Roman army which besieged Jerusalem, and which Daniel also, in the place alluded to, calls the *abomination which makes desolate*.

The Roman army is here called an *abomination*, because upon their standards were depicted the images of their emperor and their tutelary gods, whom they worshipped: and it is well known that idols were held by the Jews in the utmost abhorrence; and the very name they gave them was the expression here made use of, an *abomination*. The word *desolation* is added for an obvious reason, because tis mighty army brought ruin and desolation upon Jerusalem.

* Chap. ix. 27.

This city, and the mountain on which it stood, and a circuit of several furlongs around it, were accounted holy ground; and as the Roman standards were planted in the most conspicuous places near the fortifications of the city, they are here said to stand in *the holy place*, or, as St. Mark expresses it, “to stand where they ought not.” And Josephus tells us, that after the city was taken, “The Romans brought their ensigns into the temple, and placed one of them against the eastern gate, and sacrificed to them there; which was the greatest insult and outrage that could possibly be offered to that wretched people*.”

When therefore this desolating abomination, this idolatrous and destructive army, appeared before the holy city, “then,” says our Lord, “let them which be in Judæa flee into the mountains; let him which is on the house-top not come down to take any thing out of his house, neither let him that is in the fields return back to take his clothes:” These are allusions to Jewish customs, and are designed to impress upon the disciples the necessity of immediate flight, not suffering themselves to be delayed by turning back for any accommodations they might wish for. “And woe unto them that are with child, and to those that give suck in those days! And pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day:” that is, unfortunate will it be for those who, in such a time of terror and distress, shall have any natural impediments to obstruct their flight, and who are obliged to travel in the winter season, when the weather is severe, the roads rough, and the days short; or on the sabbath-day, when the Jews fancied it unlawful to travel more than a mile or two. These kind admonitions were not

* De Bell. Jud. l. vi. c. 6. s. 1, p. 1283.

lost upon the disciples. For we learn from the best ecclesiastical historians, that when the Roman armies approached to Jerusalem, all the Christians left that devoted city, and fled to Pella, a mountainous country, and to other places beyond the river Jordan. And Josephus also informs us, that when Vespasian was drawing his forces towards Jerusalem, a great multitude fled from Jericho into the *mountainous country* for their security*.

And happy was it for them that they did so, for the miseries experienced by the Jews in that siege, were almost without a parallel in the history of the world. “Then,” says our Saviour, “shall be great tribulation, such as was not from the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.” This expression is a proverbial one, frequently made use of by the sacred writers to express some very uncommon calamity †, and therefore it is not necessary to take the words in their strictest sense. But yet in fact they were in the present instance almost literally fulfilled; and whoever will turn to the history of this war by Josephus, and there read the detail of the horrible and almost incredible calamities endured by the inhabitants of Jerusalem, during the siege, not only from the fire and sword of the enemies without, but from famine and pestilence, and continual massacres and murders from the fiend-like fury of the seditious zealots within, will be convinced that the very strong terms made use of by our Lord, even when literally interpreted, do not go beyond the truth. Indeed Josephus himself, in his preface to his history, expresses himself almost in the very same words: “Our city, says he, of all those

* De Bell. Jud. l. iv. c. 8. s. 2. p. 1193. Ed. Huds.

Ex. x. 14. Joel ii. 2. Dan. xii. 1. Maccab. ix. 27.

subjected to the Romans, was raised to the highest felicity, and was thrust down again to the lowest gulf of misery; for if the misfortunes of all from the beginning of the world were compared with those of the Jews, they would appear much inferior upon the comparison*." Is not this almost precisely what our Saviour says, "There shall be great tribulation, such as was not from the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be." It is impossible, one would think, even for the most stubborn infidel, not to be struck with the great similarity of these two passages; and not to see that the prediction of our Lord, and the accomplishment of it, as described by the historian, are exact counterparts of each other, and seem almost as if they had been written by the very same person. Yet Josephus was not born till after our Saviour was crucified; and he was not a Christian, but a Jew; and certainly never meant to give any testimony to the truth of our religion.

The calamities above mentioned were so severe, that had they been of long continuance the whole Jewish nation must have been destroyed; "except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved," says Christ, in the 22nd verse; "but (he adds) for the elect's sake, those days shall be shortened." They *were* shortened for the sake of the elect, that is, of those Jews who had been converted to Christianity; and they were shortened by the besieged themselves, by their seditious and mutual slaughters, and their madness in burning their own provisions.

"Then," continues Jesus, "if any man shall say unto you, Lo; here is Christ, or there, believe it not: for there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and

* De Bell. Jud. Proem. p. 955. Ed. Huds.

shall show great signs and wonders, insomuch that (if it were possible) they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore, if they shall say unto you, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the west, so shall the coming of the Son of man be. For wheresoever the carcase is, there shall the eagles be gathered together." Our Lord had already cautioned his disciples against believing the false Christs and false prophets who would appear *before* the siege, and he now warns them against those that would rise up *during* the siege. This, Josephus tells us, they did in great abundance; and flattered the Jews with the hope of seeing their Messiah coming, with great power, to rescue them from the hands of the Romans*. And they also pretended to *show signs and wonders*; the very words made use of by the same historian, as well as by our Lord †. And it is remarkable, that Christ here foretels, not only the appearance of these false prophets, but the very places to which they would lead their deluded followers; and these were, the "desert, and the secret chamber." And accordingly, if you look into the history of Josephus, you will find both these places distinctly specified as the theatres on which these impostors exhibited their delusions. For the historian relates a variety of instances in which these false Christs and false prophets betrayed their followers into the desert, where they were constantly destroyed; and he also mentions one of these pretenders, who declared to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, that God commanded them to go up into a

* Jos. de Bell. Jud. l. vi. c. 5. s. 2. p. 1281. and Euseb. Hist. Eccles. l. iv. c. 6.

† Jos. Antiq. l. xx. c. 27. s. 6. p. 983. Ed. Huds.

particular part of the temple (into the *secret chamber*, as our Lord expresses it) and there they should receive the signs of deliverance. A multitude of men, women, and children, went up accordingly; but, instead of deliverance, the place was set on fire by the Romans, and six thousand perished miserably in the flames, or by endeavouring to escape them*.

But the appearance of the true Christ was not to be in that way; it was to be as visible and as rapid as a flash of lightning; “for as the lightning cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the west, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.” It shall not be in a remote desert or in a secret chamber of the temple, but shall be rendered conspicuous by the sudden and entire overthrow of Jerusalem, and its inhabitants.

“For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together.”

By the carcase is meant the Jewish nation, which was morally and judicially dead; and the instruments of divine vengeance, that is, the Roman armies, whose standards were eagles, would be collected together against this wicked people, as eagles are gathered together to devour their prey.

In the three following verses, the language of our divine Master becomes highly figurative and sublime. “Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and

* Jos. Antiq. l. xx. c. 7. s. 6. and c. 7. s. 10. De Bell. Jud. l. ii. c. 13. s. 4. and l. vii. c. 11. s. 1. Ed. Huds.

they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the one end of heaven to the other.”

Few people, I believe, read these verses, without supposing that they refer entirely to the day of judgment, many of these expressions being actually applied to that great event in the very next chapter, and in other parts of Scripture; and indeed several eminent men and learned commentators are of that opinion, and imagine that our Lord here makes a transition from the destruction of Jerusalem to the end of the world, conceiving that such very bold figures of speech could not with propriety be applied to the subversion and extinction of any city or state, however great and powerful. But the fact is, that these very same metaphors do frequently in Scripture denote the destruction of nations, cities, and kingdoms. Thus Isaiah*, speaking of the destruction of Babylon, says, “Behold, the day of the Lord cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it. For the stars of heaven, and the constellations thereof, shall not give their light; the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine.” And in almost the same terms he describes the punishment of the Idumæans †, and of Sennacherib and his people ‡. Ezekiel speaks in the same manner of Egypt §; and Daniel, of the slaughter of the Jews ||; and what is still more to the point, the prophet Joel describes this very destruction of Jerusalem

* Ch. xiii. 9.

† Ch. xxiv. 6.

‡ Ch. li. 6.

§ Ch. xxxii. 7, 8.

|| Ch. viii. 10.

in terms very similar to those of Christ; “ I will show wonders in the heavens; and in the earth blood and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord shall come*.

It is evident then that the phrases here made use of, of “ the sun being darkened, and the moon not giving her light, and the stars falling from heaven, and the powers of heaven being shaken,” are figures meant to express the fall of cities, kingdoms, and nations; and the origin of this sort of language is well illustrated by a late very learned prelate†, who tells us, that “ in ancient hieroglyphic writing, the sun, moon, and stars, were used to represent states and empires, kings, queens, and nobility; their eclipse or extinction denoted temporary disasters or entire overthrow, &c. So the prophets in like manner call kings and empires by the names of the heavenly luminaries. Stars falling from the firmament are employed to denote the destruction of the nobility and other great men; inso-much, that in reality the prophetic style seems to be *a speaking hieroglyphic*‡.”

In the same manner, in the next verse, those awful words, “ then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory,” seem applicable solely to the last advent of Christ to judge the world; and yet it is certain, that in their primary signification they refer to the manifestation of Christ’s power and glory, in coming to execute judgement on the guilty Jews, by the total overthrow of

* Ch. ii. 30, 31.

† Bishop Warburton.

‡ Div. Leg. 8vo ed. vol. iv. p. 175.

their temple, their city, and their government; for so our Lord himself explains what is meant by *the coming of the Son of man*, in the 27th, 28th, and 37th verses of this chapter. And when the prophet Daniel is predicting this very appearance of Christ to punish the Jews, he describes him as “coming in the clouds of heaven, and there was given him dominion and glory, and a kingdom*.”

The same remark will hold with regard to the 31st verse; “he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of the earth even to the other.” These words, also, though they seem as if they could belong to no other subject than the last day, yet most assuredly relate principally to the great object of this prophecy, the destruction of Jerusalem; after which dreadful event we are here told that Christ will send forth his *angels*; that is, his messengers or ministers, (for so that word strictly signifies†) to preach his gospel to all the world, which preaching is called by the prophets, “*lifting up the voice like a trumpet †* ; and they shall gather together his elect (that is, shall collect disciples and converts to the faith) from the four winds, from the four quarters of the earth;” or, as St. Luke expresses it, “from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south‡.”

Our Lord then goes on to point out the *time* when all these things shall take place, and thus answers the other question put to him by the disciples, “Tell us,

* Dan. vii. 14.

† Vid. Haggai i. 13. Mal. ii. 7. iii. 1. Matt. xi. 10. Mark i. 2. Luke viii. 27.

‡ Isaiah lviii. 1.

§ Luke xiii. 29.

when shall these things be?"—"Now learn, says he, a parable of the fig-tree: When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh; so likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."

The only observation necessary to be made here is, that the time when all these predictions were to be fulfilled is here limited to a certain period. They were to be accomplished before the generation of men then existing should pass away. And accordingly all these events did actually take place within forty years after our Saviour delivered this prophecy; and this by the way is an unanswerable proof, that every thing our Lord had been saying in the preceding part of the chapter related principally, not to the day of judgement, or to any other very remote event, but to the destruction of Jerusalem, which did in reality happen before that generation had passed away.

"But of that day and hour knoweth no man; no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only." That is, although the time when Jerusalem is to be destroyed, is, as I have told you, fixed *generally* to this generation, yet the *precise day and hour* of that event is not known either to men or angels, but to God only. This he speaks in his human nature, and in his prophetic capacity. This point was not made known to him by the spirit, nor was he commissioned to reveal it.

It is supposed by several learned commentators, that the words *that day* and *that hour*, refer to the day of judgement, which is immediately alluded to in the preceding verse, *heaven and earth shall pass away*. This

conjecture is an ingenious one, and may be true; but if it be, this verse should be inclosed in a parenthesis, because what follows most certainly relates to the destruction of Jerusalem, (to which St. Luke in the seventeenth chapter expressly confines it*) and cannot, without great violence to the words, be applied to the final advent of Christ. “As the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying, and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away: so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.” That is, when the day of desolation shall come upon the city and temple of Jerusalem, the inhabitants will be as thoughtless and unconcerned, and as unprepared for it, as the antediluvians were for the flood in the days of Noah. But as some (more particularly the Christians) will be more watchful, and in a better state of mind than others, the providence of God will make a distinction between his faithful and his disobedient servants, and will protect and preserve the former, but leave the latter to be taken or destroyed by their enemies; although they may both be in the same situation of life, may be engaged in the same occupations, and may appear to the world to be in every respect in similar circumstances.

Here ends the prophetical part of our Lord’s discourse; what follows is altogether exhortatory. It may be called the moral of the prophecy, and the prac-

* Luke xvii. 26, 27; 35, 36.

tical application of it not only to his immediate hearers, but to his disciples in all future ages; for this concluding admonition, most certainly alludes no less to the final judgement than to the destruction of Jerusalem, and applies with at least equal force to both. Indeed the prophecy itself, although in its primary and strictest sense it relates throughout to the destruction of the temple, city, and government of Jerusalem, yet, as I have before observed, may be considered, and was probably intended by Jesus, as a type and an emblem of the dissolution of the world itself, to which the total subversion of a great city and a whole nation bears some resemblance. But with respect to the conclusion, there can be no doubt of its being intended to call our attention to the last solemn day of account; and with a view of its producing this effect, I shall now press it upon your minds in the very words of our Lord, without any comment, for it is too clear to require any explanation, and too impressive to require any additional enforcement. “ Watch ye, therefore, for ye know not at what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the good man of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh. Who then is a faithful and a wise servant, whom his Lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, that he shall make him ruler over all his goods. But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to smite his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink

with the drunken; the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

LECTURE XX.



MATTHEW XXIV—XXV.

IN my last Lecture I explained to you that remarkable prophecy respecting the destruction of Jerusalem, which is contained in the twenty-fourth chapter of St. Matthew; and by a reference to the historians who record or mention that event, I proved to you the complete and exact accomplishment of that wonderful prediction in all its parts. And this, in a common case, I should have thought fully sufficient for your satisfaction. But this prophecy stands so eminently distinguished by its singular importance, and the great variety of matter which it embraces, and it affords so decisive, so irresistible a proof of the divine authority of our religion, that it appears to me to be well worthy of a little more attention and consideration. I shall therefore, before I proceed to the next chapter, make such farther remarks upon it, as may tend to throw new light upon the subject, to show more distinctly the exact correspondence of the prediction with the event, and to point out the very interesting conclusions that may be drawn from it.

And first I would observe, that, in some instances the providence of God seems evidently to have interposed in order to bring about several of the events,

which Jesus here alludes to or predicts. Thus, in the twelfth year of Nero, Cestius Gallus, the president of Syria, came against Jerusalem with a powerful army; and, as Josephus assures us, he might, had he assaulted the city, easily have taken it, and thereby have put an end to the war*. But without any apparent reason, and contrary to all expectation, he suddenly raised the siege, and departed. This, and some other very incidental delays, which took place before Vespasian besieged the city, and Titus surrounded it with a wall, gave the Christians within an opportunity of following our Lord's advice, and of escaping to the mountains, which afterwards it would have been impossible for them to do.

In the same manner the besieged inhabitants themselves helped to fulfil another of our Saviour's predictions, *that those days should be shortened*; for they burnt their own provisions, which would have been sufficient for many years, and fatally deserted their strongest holds, where they never could have been taken by force, the fortifications of the city being considered as impregnable. Titus was so sensible of this, that he himself ascribed his success to God: "We have fought," said he to his friends, "with God on our side; and it is God who hath dragged the Jews out of their strong holds; for what could the hands of men and machines do against such towers as these †?"

In the next place it is worthy of remark, that at the time when our Lord delivered this prophecy, there was not the slightest probability of the Romans invading Judæa, much less of their besieging the city of Jerusalem, of their surrounding it with a wall, of their

* De Bell. Jud. l. ii. c. 19.

† Newton's Dissert. on Prophecy, vol. ii. p. 276.

taking it by storm, and of their destroying the Temple so entirely, as not to leave one stone upon another. The Jews were then at perfect peace with the Romans. The latter could have no motives of interest or of policy to invade, destroy, and depopulate a country, which was already subject to them, and from which they reaped many advantages. The fortifications too of the city were (as I have before observed) so strong, that they were deemed invincible by any human force, and it was not the custom of the Romans to demolish and raze the very foundations of the towns they took, and exterminate the inhabitants, but rather to preserve them as monuments of their victories and their triumphs.

It could not therefore be from mere human sagacity and foresight that our Saviour foretold these events; or, had he even hazarded a conjecture respecting a war with the Romans, and the siege of Jerusalem, yet he could only have done this in general terms; he could never have imagined or invented such a variety of minute particulars as he did predict, and as actually came to pass.

It is, indeed, of great importance to observe the surprising assemblage of striking circumstances which Christ pointed out in this prophecy. They are much more numerous than is commonly supposed, and well deserve to be distinctly specified.

They may be arranged under three general heads.

The first consists of those signs that were to *precede* the destruction of Jerusalem.

And these signs were, false Christs. false prophets, rumours of wars, actual wars, nation rising against nation, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, fearful sights, the persecution of the apostles, the apostacy of some

Christians, and the treachery of others, the preservation of Christ's faithful disciples, and the propagation of the gospel through the whole Roman world.

The second head is the commencement of the siege.

Under this head are specified the distinguishing standard of the Roman army, the eagle, with the images of the gods and their emperor affixed to it.

The idolatrous worship paid to this standard, called the *abomination*, for so it was to the Jews.

The planting of this standard near the holy city, and afterward in the very Temple.

The *desolation* which the Roman armies spread around them.

The escape of the Christians to the mountainous country round Jerusalem.

The inconceivable and unparalleled calamities of every kind which the wretched inhabitants endured during the siege; and the shortening of those days of vengeance on account of the Christians.

The third head is the actual capture of Jerusalem by the besieging army.

And here it is foretold, "that not one stone of its magnificent buildings should be left upon another;" that the temple, the government, the state, the polity of the Jews, should be utterly subverted; and, lastly, that all these things should happen before the then present race of men should be extinguished.

If, now, we collect together the several particulars here specified, they amount to no less than twenty-two in number. A larger detail of minute circumstances than is to be found in any other of our Lord's prophecies; and all these we see actually fulfilled in the history of Josephus, and other ancient writers; and it is extremely remarkable, that his description of the

siege of Jerusalem, like this prophecy, is more minutely circumstantial and more spread out into detail, than the account of any other siege that we have in ancient history. It should seem therefore as if this historian was purposely raised up by Providence to record this memorable event, and to verify our Saviour's predictions. And, indeed, no one could possibly be better qualified for the task than he, from his situation and circumstances, from his integrity and veracity, and, above all, from the opportunities he had of being perfectly well acquainted with every thing he relates.

He was born at Jerusalem, under the reign of the emperor Caligula, and about seven years after our Lord's crucifixion. He was of a noble family; on his father's side descended from the most illustrious of the high priests; and on his mother's side, from the blood royal. At the age of nineteen, after having made a trial of all the different sects of the Jews, he embraced that of the Pharisees; and at the age of twenty-six he made a journey to Rome, to obtain from Nero the release of some Jewish priests, who had been thrown into bonds by Felix the procurator of Judæa. He succeeded in this business; and on his return to Jerusalem found his countrymen resolved on commencing hostilities against the Romans, from which he endeavoured to dissuade them; but in vain. He was soon after appointed by the Jewish government to the command of an army in Galilee, where he signalized himself in many engagements; but at the siege of Jotapata was taken prisoner by Vespasian, and afterwards carried by Titus to the siege of Jerusalem, where he was an eye-witness of every thing that passed, till the city was taken and destroyed by the Romans. He then composed his History of the Jewish

War, and particularly of the siege and capture of Jerusalem, in seven books; which he first wrote in Hebrew, and afterwards in Greek, and presented it to Vespasian and Titus, by both of whom it was highly approved, and ordered to be made public. And it is in this history that we find the accomplishment of all the several facts and events relative to the siege and the destruction of Jerusalem, which our Saviour foretold forty years before they happened, and which have been above recited. This history is spoken of in the highest terms by men of the greatest learning and the soundest judgement, from its first publication to the present time.

The fidelity, the veracity, and probity of the writer, are universally allowed; and Scaliger in particular declares, that not only in the affairs of the Jews, but even of foreign nations, he deserves more credit than all the Greek and Roman writers put together*. Certain at least it is, that he had that most essential qualification of an historian, a perfect and accurate knowledge of all the transactions which he relates; that he had no prejudices to mislead him in the representation of them; and that, above all, he meant no favour to the Christian cause. For even allowing the so much controverted passage, in which he is supposed to bear testimony to Christ, to be genuine, it does not appear that he ever became a convert to his religion, but continued probably a zealous Jew to the end of his life.

From this account it is evident, that we may most securely rely on every thing he tells us respecting the siege of Jerusalem; and that nothing can more completely demonstrate the truth of our blessed Lord's

* In Prolegom. ad opus de Emendatione Temporum.

predictions, than the uncorrupt, impartial, and undesignated testimony given to their completion by this justly celebrated historian.

Here then we have a proof, which it is impossible to controvert, of our Saviour's perfect knowledge of future events, which belongs solely to God, and to those inspired and sent by him; which of course establishes in the clearest manner, the divine mission of Christ, and the divine origin of our religion.

The only pretence that can possibly be set up against this prophecy is, that it was not delivered by our Saviour previous to the destruction of Jerusalem, but inserted afterwards by St. Matthew and the other evangelists, subsequent to that event. This may undoubtedly be said, and many things may be said by those whose trade is objection and cavil: but can it be said with the smallest appearance of truth? Is there the slightest ground to support it? Most certainly not. It is a mere gratuitous assertion without the least shadow of proof; and an opposite assertion is a sufficient answer to it. We deny the fact; and call upon our adversaries to prove it, if they can: they have never so much as attempted it. Not even the *earliest* enemies of our faith, those who were much nearer the primitive ages, and much more likely to detect a fraud in the evangelical writers (if there were any) than modern infidels, even these never intimate the slightest suspicion that this prophecy was inserted after the event.

But besides this, there are good grounds to believe, not only that the three gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, where this prophecy is related, were written and published before the destruction of Jerusalem, but that the writers of them were all dead before that

event. It is also well known, that both St. Peter and St. Paul, who allude in their Epistles to the approaching ruin of Jerusalem*, (which they learned from our Lord's predictions) and who had seen and approved the gospels of St. Mark and St. Luke, were put to death under Nero, and Jerusalem was not taken till the succeeding reign of Vespasian.

It should be observed farther, that although this prophecy is by far the fullest, and clearest, and most distinct, that our Lord delivered respecting the destruction of Jerusalem, he plainly, though briefly, alludes to it in several other parts of the gospel†. And these occasional predictions of that event are so frequent, and so perfectly agree with this larger prophecy, they are introduced so incidentally in the way of parables, or in answer to some question; they arise, in short, so naturally from the occasion, and are so inartificially interwoven into the very essence and substance of the narrative, that they have every imaginable appearance of having formed an original part of it, and cannot possibly be considered by any good judge of composition as subsequent or fraudulent insertions.

Indeed such a fabrication as this would have been the silliest and most useless fraud that can be imagined. For it is very remarkable, that the sacred writers make no use of this prophecy as a proof of our Saviour's divine powers, or of the truth of his religion. They appeal frequently to the ancient prophecies concerning him, to his miracles, and above all to his resurrection, as evidences that he was the Messiah, and the Son of

* Acts ii. 19. 1 Pet. iv. 7. Phil. iv. 5. 1 Thess. ii. 16. Newton on Proph. vol. ii. p. 225. Jortin's Remarks, vol. i. p. 49.

† Matt. xxii. 1—7; xxiii. 33—39. Luke xix. 41—44; xiii. 1—5; &c. &c.

God; but they never appeal to the accomplishment of this prophecy in support of those great truths, though certainly a very natural and important proof to be adduced in favour of them.

But that which ought, with every reasonable man, to be decisive of the question, is this, that three of the evangelists out of four concur in giving us this prophecy as a part of their history of our Lord, and as actually delivered by him, at the period assigned to it, which we know was nearly forty years before the destruction of Jerusalem. Now we have no more reason to doubt their veracity in *this* point than in any other; and if, on the strength of their character, on the evident marks of integrity, simplicity, and truth, which appear in every page of their writings; and above all, if in consequence of their undergoing the bitterest sufferings as an evidence of their sincerity, we give implicit credit to what they tell us respecting the life, the death, the doctrines, the miracles, and the resurrection of Christ, there is the very same reason for admitting the genuineness of this prophecy. It stands on the same solid grounds of *their veracity and probity* as the rest of the gospel does; and when men lay down their lives, as they did, in confirmation of what they assert, they have surely some right to be believed.

We may then safely consider this prophecy as an unquestionable proof of the divine foreknowledge of our Lord, and the divine authority of the gospel; and on this ground only (were it necessary) we might securely rest the whole fabric of our religion. Indeed this remarkable prediction has always been considered, by every impartial person, as one of the most powerful arguments in favour of Christianity; and in

our own times, more particularly, a man of distinguished talents and acknowledged eminence in his profession, and in the constant habit of weighing, sifting, and scrutinizing evidence with the minutest accuracy in courts of justice, has publicly declared, that he considered this prophecy, if there were nothing else to support Christianity, as *absolutely irresistible* *

But our Lord's predictions respecting this devoted city do not end even here. He not only foretels the entire destruction of Jerusalem, but the *continuance* of its desolation and subjection to heathens, and the dispersion and captivity of the Jews for a long period of time. For if we turn to the parallel place in St. Luke, we shall find him expressing himself in these words, respecting the Jews and their city; "they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled †." That is, not only vast numbers of the Jews shall perish at the siege of Jerusalem, partly by their own seditions, and partly by the sword of the enemy, but multitudes shall also be made captives, and be dispersed into all countries; and Jerusalem shall remain in a state of desolation and oppression, trampled upon and trodden down by heathen

* See Mr. Erskine's eloquent speech at the trial of Williams, for publishing Paine's Age of Reason; to which I must beg leave to add the weighty and important testimony of that most able and upright judge, Lord Kenyon, who, in his charge to the jury, on the same occasion, made this noble CONFESSIO OF FAITH: "I am fully impressed with the great truths of religion, which, thank God, I was taught in my early years to believe; and which the hour of reflection and inquiry, instead of creating any doubt, has fully confirmed me in."—How vain are all the idle cavils of the whole tribe of infidels put together, when contrasted with such a declaration as this from such a man!

† Luke xxi. 24.

conquerors and rulers, till all the Gentiles shall be converted to the faith of Christ, and the Jews themselves shall acknowledge him to be the Messiah, and shall be restored to their ancient city.

The former part of this prophecy has been already most exactly fulfilled, and is an earnest that all the rest will in due time be accomplished. The number of Jews slain during the siege was upwards of one million one hundred thousand, and near three hundred thousand more were destroyed in other places in the course of the war *. Besides these, as Josephus informs us, no less than ninety-seven thousand were made captives and dispersed into different countries, some into Egypt, some to Cæsarea, some carried to grace the triumph of Titus at Rome, and the rest distributed over the Roman provinces †; and the whole Jewish people continue to this hour scattered over all the nations of the earth.

With respect to their city, it has remained, for the most part, in a state of ruin and desolation, from its destruction by the Romans to the present time; and has never been under the government of the Jews themselves, but oppressed and broken down by a succession of foreign masters, the Romans, the Saracens, the Franks, the Mamalukes, and last by the Turks, to whom it is still subject. It is not, therefore, only in the history of Josephus, and in other ancient writers, that we are to look for the accomplishment of our Lord's predictions; we see them verified at this moment before our eyes, in the desolated state of the once celebrated city and temple of Jerusalem, and in the present condition of the Jewish people, not col-

* Bell. Jud. l. ii. iii. iv. vii. &c.

† Josephus Bell. Jud. l. vi. c. 9.

lected together into any one country, into one political society, and under one form of government, but dispersed over every region of the globe, and every where treated with contumely and scorn.

There was indeed one attempt made to rebuild their temple and their city, and restore them to their ancient prosperity and splendour. It was made, too, for the express and avowed purpose of defeating that very prophecy we have been considering; and the event was such as might be expected from the folly and presumption of the man who dared to oppose the designs of Providence, and to fight against God. This man was the emperor Julian, who, as you all know, was first a Christian, then apostatized from that religion, professed himself a pagan, and became a bitter and avowed enemy to the gospel. This prince assured the Jews, that if he was successful in the Persian war, he would rebuild their city, restore them to their habitations, re-establish their government and their religion, and join with them in worshipping the great God of the universe. He actually began this singular enterprise, by attempting to rebuild their temple with the greatest magnificence. He assigned immense sums for the structure; and gave it in charge to Alypius of Antioch, who had formerly been lieutenant in Britain, to superintend the work. Alypius exerted himself with great vigour, and was assisted in it by the governor of the province. But soon after they had begun the work, dreadful balls of fire bursting out from the foundations in several parts, rendered the place inaccessible to the workmen, who were frequently burnt with the flames; and in this manner, the fiery elements obstinately repelling them, forced them at length to abandon the design. The account of this extraordi-

nary miracle we have not only from ancient Christian writers of credit, who lived at the very time when it happened, but from an heathen author of great veracity, Ammianus Marcellinus, who wrote the history of Roman affairs from Nerva to the death of Valens, in the year 378. Though he wrote in Latin, he was a Greek by birth. He had several honourable military commands under different emperors; was with Julian in his Persian expedition, in the year 363, and was a great admirer of that emperor, whom he makes his hero; yet acknowledges that his attempt to rebuild the temple of Jerusalem was defeated in the manner I have mentioned*. The fact is frequently appealed to by the Christians of those days, who affirm that it was in the mouths of all men, and was not denied even by the atheists themselves; and “if it seem yet incredible to any one, he may repair (say they) both to witnesses of it yet living, and to them who have heard it from their mouths; yea, they may view the foundations, lying yet bare and naked †.” And of this, says Chrysostom, all we Christians are witnesses; these things being done not long since in our own time ‡.

Such are the testimonies for this miracle, which are collected and stated with great force by the learned Bishop Warburton, in his work called “Julian;” and most of them are also admitted by Mr. Gibbon, who, in his recital of this miracle, acknowledges that it is attested by *contemporary and respectable evidence*; that Gregory Nazianzen, who published his account of it before the expiration of the same year, declares it was not disputed by the infidels of those days, and that

* Ammianus Marcellinus l. xxiii. c. 1. p. 350. Ed. Valesii.

† Sozomen. Hist. Eccles. l. v. c. 22. p. 632. Do. 633. B.

‡ Chrys. adv. Judæos Orat. iii. p. 436.

his testimony is confirmed by the *unexceptionable testimony* of Ammianus Marcellinus*.

I now proceed to the explanation of the next chapter, the 25th of St. Matthew; which begins with presenting to us two parables, that of the ten virgins, and that of the servants of a great lord entrusted with different talents, of which they are called upon to render an account. As these parables contain nothing that requires a very particular explanation, I shall content myself, with observing, that they are designed to carry on the subject with which the preceding chapter concludes; namely, that of the last solemn day of retribution: and the object of both is to call our attention to that great event, and to warn us of the necessity of being always prepared for it. Thus in the parable of the ten virgins, the five that were wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps, and when the bridegroom appeared they were ready to receive him, and went in with him to the marriage. But the five that were foolish took no oil with them; and while they went to procure it, the bridegroom *unexpectedly* came, and the door was *shut* against them. The application is obvious, and is given by our Lord himself in these words, “watch ye, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour when the Lord cometh.”

In the same manner, in the parable of the talents, he that had received the five talents, and he that had received the two, did, during the absence of their Lord, so diligently cultivate and so considerably improve them, that when at length he came to reckon with them, they returned him his own again with usury, and received both applause and reward; while that slothful and indolent servant, who had received only

* History of the Roman Empire, vol. ii. p. 388.

one talent, and instead of improving it went and hid it in the earth, when his lord came and required it at his hands, was severely reprimanded for his want of activity and exertion, and was cast out as an unprofitable servant into outer darkness.

This, like the former parable, was plainly meant to intimate to us that we ought to be *always prepared* to meet our Lord, and to give him a good account of the use we have made of our time, and of the talents, whether many or few, that were entrusted to our care.

After these admonitory parables, and these earnest exhortations to prepare for the last great day, our blessed Lord is naturally led on to a description of the day itself; and it is a description which for dignity and grandeur has not its equal in any writer, sacred or profane. It is as follows: "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, and the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee; or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in; or naked and clothed thee? or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee;

And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Then shall he also say unto those on his left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels : for I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat ; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink ; I was a stranger, and ye took me not in ; naked, and ye clothed me not ; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee ? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment ; but the righteous into life eternal.”

Such is the description which our divine Master gives us of the great day of account ; and so solemn, so awful, so sublime a scene, was never before presented to the mind of man.

Our Saviour represents himself as a great and mighty King, as the supreme Lord of all, sitting on the throne of his glory, with *all the nations of the earth assembled before him*, and waiting their final doom from his lips. What an astonishing and stupendous spectacle is this ! He then at one glance, which penetrates the hearts of every individual of that immense multitude, discerns the respective merits or demerits of every human being there present, and separates the good from the bad with as much ease as a shepherd divides his sheep from his goats. He next questions them on one most important branch of their duty, as a *specimen* of the manner in which the inquiry into the

whole of their behaviour will be conducted ; and then, with the authority of an almighty Judge and Sovereign, he in a few words pronounces the irreversible sentence, which consigns the wicked to everlasting punishment, and the righteous to life eternal.

Before I press this important subject any farther on the hearts of those who hear me, I must make a few observations on the description which has been just laid before you.

The first is, that all mankind, when assembled before the judgement-seat of Christ, are divided into two great classes, the wicked and the good, those who are punished, and those who are rewarded. There is no middle, no intermediate station provided for those who may be called neutrals in religion, who are indifferent and lukewarm, who are “neither hot nor cold,” who do not reject the gospel, but give themselves very little concern about it, who, instead of working out their salvation with fear and trembling, leave that matter to take care of itself, and are at perfect ease as to the event. These men cannot certainly expect to inherit everlasting life. But they hope, probably, to be considered as harmless inoffensive beings, and to be exempted from punishment at least, if not entitled to reward. But how vain this hope is, our Saviour’s representation of the final judgement most clearly shows. They who are not set on the right, must go to the left. They who are not rewarded, are consigned to punishment. There are indeed different mansions both for the righteous and the wicked ; there are different degrees of punishment for the one, and of reward for the other ; yet still it does not appear that there is any middle or intermediate state between punishment and reward.

The next remark, and which has some affinity to the last, is, that we are to be examined at the bar of our great Judge, not merely as to our exemption from crimes, but as to our performance of good actions; substantial and genuine Christian virtues are expected at our hands. It will not be sufficient for us to plead that we kept ourselves clear from sin; we must show that we have exerted ourselves in the faithful discharge of all those various important duties which the gospel requires from us.

Lastly, it must be observed, and it is an observation of the utmost importance, and which I wish to impress most forcibly upon your minds, that although charity to our neighbour, and indeed only one branch of that comprehensive duty, viz. *liberality to the poor*, is here specified, as the only Christian virtue, concerning which inquiry will be made at the day of Judgement; yet we must not imagine that this is the only virtue which will be expected from us, and that on this alone will depend our final salvation. Nothing can be more distant from truth, or more dangerous to religion than this opinion. The fact is, that charity, or love to man in all its extent, being the most eminent of all the evangelical virtues, being that which Christ has made the very badge and discriminating mark of his religion, is here constituted by him the representative of all other virtues; just as faith is, in various passages of scripture, used to denote and represent the whole Christian religion. Nothing is more common than this sort of figure (called a synecdoche) in profane, as well as sacred writers; by which a part, an essential and important part, is made to stand for the whole. But that neither charity nor any other single virtue can entitle us to eternal life, is clear from the whole tenour

of the New Testament, which every where requires universal holiness of life. We are commanded “to stand perfect and complete in *all* the will of God* ;” to add to our faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity †. Here you see that charity makes only one in that large assemblage of virtues, which are required to constitute the Christian character. And so far is it from being true, that any single virtue will give us admission into the kingdom of heaven, that St. James lays down a directly opposite doctrine, namely, that if we do not to the best of our power cultivate *every* virtue without exception, we shall be objects of punishment, instead of reward. “Whosoever,” says he, “shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.” Nay, even if we endeavour to fulfil *all* righteousness, yet it is not on that righteousness, but on the merits of our Redeemer, that we must rely for our acceptance with God. For the plain doctrine of scripture is, that it is “the blood of Jesus Christ that cleanseth us from all sin ‡;” and that “by grace we are saved, through faith; and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God §.” Of this, indeed, no notice is taken in our Saviour’s description of the last judgment, and that for a plain reason, because he had not yet finished the gracious work of our redemption. He had not yet offered himself up upon the cross as a sacrifice, a propitiation for the sins of the whole world. But after that great act of mercy was performed, it is then the uniform language of the sacred writers, “that we are justified freely by the grace of God,

* Col. iv. 12.

† 2 Pet. i. 6.

‡ 1 John i. 7.

§ Ephes. ii. 8.

through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*.”

We must therefore collect the terms of our salvation not from any one passage of scripture, but from the whole tenour of the sacred writings taken together; and if we judge by this rule, which is the only one that can be securely relied upon, we shall find that nothing less than a sincere and lively faith in Christ, producing in us, as far as the infirmity of our nature will allow, *universal holiness of life*, can ever make our final calling and election sure. But thus much we may certainly collect from our Lord's representation of our final judgement, that charity, or love to man, in the true scriptural sense of that word, is one of the most essential duties of our religion; and that to neglect that virtue, above all others, which our Redeemer and our Judge has selected as the peculiar object of his approbation, and as the representative of all the other evangelical virtues, must be peculiarly dangerous, and render us peculiarly unfit to appear at the last day before the great tribunal of Christ.

How soon we may be summoned there no one can tell. The final dissolution of this earthly system may be at a great distance; but, what is the same thing to every moral and religious purpose, *death* may be very near. It is at least, even to the youngest of us, uncertain, and in whatever state it overtakes us, in that state will judgement find us; for there is no repentance in the grave; and as we die, so shall we stand before our Almighty Judge. “Take heed therefore to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and the cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come upon all them that dwell on the face

* Rom. iii. 24.

of the earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man*.”

* Luke xxi. 34, 35, 36.

LECTURE XXI.

MATTHEW XXVI.

WE are now approaching the last sad scene of our Saviour's life, which commences with the 26th chapter, and continues in a progressive accumulation of one misery upon another to the end of St. Matthew's gospel.

The 26th chapter, which will be the subject of the present Lecture, begins with informing us that two days before the great Feast of the Passover, the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people, assembled together unto the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and consulted that they might take Jesus by subtilty and kill him.

Whilst they were thus employed, Jesus himself was in Bethany (a small village near Jerusalem) at the house of a person called Simon, whom he had cured of a leprosy; and here an incident took place which marks at once the manners of the country and the times, and places in a striking point of view the different characters of the several persons concerned in it.

As Jesus was sitting at meat in the house above mentioned, "there came unto him a woman, having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head. But when his disciples saw it,

they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste? for this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor. When Jesus understood it, he said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me. For ye have the poor always with you, but me ye have not always. For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial. Verily I say unto you, where-soever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there also shall this which this woman hath done be told for a memorial of her."

There are in this little story several circumstances that deserve our notice.

The first is, that the act here mentioned, of pouring the ointment on the head of Jesus, though it may appear strange to us, yet was perfectly conformable to the customs of ancient times, not only in Asia, but in the more polished parts of Europe. Chaplets of flowers and odoriferous unguents are mentioned by several classic authors as in use at the festive entertainments both of the Greeks and Romans; and particularly among the Jews, the custom of anointing the head seems to have been almost as common a practice as that of washing the face. For they are mentioned together by our Lord in his direction to his disciples on the subject of fasting: "But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face, that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which seeth in secret*."

But there was a much higher purpose to which the effusion of ointment on the head was applied by the Jews. It was by this ceremony that Kings, Priests, and Prophets, were set apart and consecrated to their

* Matt. vi. 17, 18.

respective offices. And for this reason it was that our blessed Lord himself, who united in his own person the threefold character of King, Priest, and Prophet, was distinguished by the name of the MESSIAH, which in the Hebrew language means THE ANOINTED. It was therefore with peculiar propriety that this discriminating mark of respect was shown to Jesus by the devout woman here mentioned, though she herself was probably altogether unconscious of that propriety. Jesus however saw at once the piety of her heart, and the purity of her intentions, and with that sweetness of temper and urbanity of manners which were natural to him, not only accepted her humble offering with complacency, but generously defended her against the illiberal cavils of his fastidious followers. And then he added a promise of that distinguished honour which should perpetuate this meritorious act of hers to all future ages: "Verily I say unto you, that wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this that this woman hath done be told for a memorial of her." This we know was no vain prediction; it has been most literally and punctually fulfilled, and we ourselves are witnesses of its completion at this very moment.

The next remarkable occurrence in this chapter is the institution of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper by our Saviour, when he was eating the Passover with his-disciples.

The Passover was one of the most solemn and sacred feasts of the Jews. It was so called because it was established in commemoration of the deliverance of the Jews from their bondage in Egypt, at which time the destroying angel, when he put to death the first-born of the Egyptians, *passed over* the houses of the Israelites,

which were all marked with the blood of the lamb that had been killed and eaten the evening before in every Hebrew house, and was therefore called the *Paschal Lamb*.

This great festival our Saviour observed with his disciples the evening before he suffered, and with them ate the paschal lamb, which was a prophetic type of himself. For he was the *real* paschal lamb that was sacrificed for the sins of men. He was the lamb slain from the foundation of the world*; the lamb without blemish and without spot †, as the paschal lamb was ordered to be ‡. There can be no doubt, therefore, that the paschal lamb of the Jews was meant to be an emblem of our Lord. The slaying of that lamb prefigured the slaying of Christ upon the cross; and as those houses which were sprinkled with the blood of the lamb were passed over by the destroying angel, so they whose souls are sprinkled with the blood of Christ are saved from destruction, and their sins *passed over* and forgiven for his sake. And it is a very remarkable circumstance, that our Saviour was crucified, and our deliverance from the bondage of sin completed, in the same month, and on the same day of the month, that the Israelites were delivered from the bondage of Egypt, by their departure from that land. For the Israelites went out of Egypt, and Christ was put to death, on the fifteenth day of the month of Nisan.

I have premised thus much respecting the passover and the paschal lamb, because it will throw considerable light on the true nature and meaning of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, which Jesus now instituted, and of which the evangelist gives the following account: "When the even was come, our Lord sat down

* Rev. xiii. 8.

† 1 Peter i. 19.

‡ Ex. xii. 5.

with the twelve to eat the passover; and as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many, for the remission of sins." This is the whole of the institution of the sacred rite by our blessed Lord, as recorded in St. Matthew's gospel; and nothing can be more evident than that when he brake the bread, and gave it to his disciples, and said, "Take, eat, this is my body;" he meant to say that the bread was to represent his body, and the breaking of it was to represent the breaking of his body upon the cross. In the same manner, when he took the cup and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink ye all of it, for this is my blood of the New Testament (or New Covenant) which is shed for many, for the remission of sins;" his meaning was, that the wine in the cup was a representation of his blood that was to be shed upon the cross as an expiation and atonement for the sins of the whole world. And his disciples were to eat the bread and drink the wine so consecrated, and so appropriated to this particular purpose, in grateful remembrance of what our Lord suffered for their salvation, and that of all mankind; for St. Luke adds these affecting and impressive words of our Saviour, *This do in remembrance of me.*

The Lord's Supper therefore was evidently to be a solemn commemoration and recognition of the redemption and deliverance of mankind by the death of Christ, as the Feast of the Passover was of the deliverance of the Israelites from the destroying angel. Nor is this all; for as the Jews were accustomed in their peace-

offerings to eat a part of the victim, and thus partook of the sacrifice; so they would perceive that in this *new* institution, the eating of the bread and drinking of the wine was a mark and symbol of their participating in the effects of this *new* peace-offering, the death of Christ; whose body was broken, and whose blood was shed for them on the cross.

They would also see that this supper of our Lord was from that time to be substituted in the room of the passover: and that they might have no doubt on this head, our Lord expressly declares that this was to be the case; for immediately after the institution of this sacrament he adds, “ I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it *new* with you in my Father’s kingdom.” The meaning is, this is the last time that this supper shall be a representation of the passover. It shall hereafter take a *new* signification. When my kingdom (that is, my religion) is fully confirmed and established by my rising from the dead, this supper shall be the memorial of a more noble sacrifice. The passover, which was a type of the redemption to be wrought by me, shall be fulfilled and completed by my death and resurrection. The shadow passes away; the substance takes place; and when you eat this supper in remembrance of me, there will I be virtually present amongst you; and your souls shall be nourished and refreshed by my grace, as your bodies are by the bread and wine.

You will perceive, by what I have here said on the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, that I have confined myself to that which was immediately before me, the original institution of it by our blessed Lord. I have not entered into those farther illustrations of this holy

rite, which are presented to us in other parts of Scripture; particularly in the 11th chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians. To go at length into the consideration of this important subject, would lead me into a much longer discussion than the nature of this discourse will admit. I shall therefore only observe farther, that whoever reads with attention this first institution of the Lord's Supper, whoever reflects that it was the very last meal that our Lord ate with his disciples, that the next day he underwent for our sakes a most excruciating and ignominious death, and that he requires us to receive this sacrament *in remembrance of him*; whoever, I say, can, notwithstanding all this, disobey the last command of his dying Redeemer, must be destitute, not only of all the devout sentiments of a Christian, but of all the honest feelings of a man.

After having thus kept the passover for the last time, our Lord and his apostles sung a hymn, as was usual with the Jews after their repasts; and the hymn they sung on this occasion was probably what they called *the Paschal Psalms*, from the 113th to the 118th, in which the disciples, accustomed to that recital, readily joined. They then went out into the Mount of Olives; and as they were going, Jesus saith unto them, "All ye shall be *offended* because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee." This was a prophetic warning to the disciples, that they would all be terrified by the dangers that awaited him, and would desert and virtually renounce him that very night. The words here quoted, "I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered

abroad," are from the thirteenth chapter of Zechariah. But to console and support them under this trial, our Lord assures them that he would rise again from the dead, and after his resurrection would meet them at a certain place he appointed in Galilee. The apostles, as we may easily imagine, were greatly hurt at this admonitory prediction of our Lord, and protested that they would never forsake him. But St. Peter more particularly, who, from the ardour of his disposition, was always more forward in his professions, and more indignant at the slightest reflection on his character, than any of the rest, immediately cried out, with warmth and eagerness, "Though all men should be offended because of thee, yet will I *never* be offended." But Jesus, who knew him much better than he did himself, said unto him, "Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow (that is, before three in the morning) thou shalt deny me thrice." Peter, still confident of his own integrity and sincere attachment to his divine Master, and ignorant of the weakness of human-nature at the approach of danger, replied, with still greater vehemence, "Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee:" and the rest of the disciples joined with him in these earnest protestations of inviolable fidelity. How far they were verified by the event, we shall soon see.

We are now arrived at a very awful and somewhat mysterious part of our Saviour's history, his agony in the garden, which is next related to us by St. Matthew.

"Then cometh Jesus (says the evangelist) with them to a place called Gethsemane, a rich valley near the Mount of Olives, through which ran the brook Cedron, and on the side was a garden, into which

Jesus entered. And he said unto his disciples, Sit ye here (at the entrance probably of the garden) while I go and pray yonder. And he took with him, into a more retired part of the garden, Peter, and the two sons of Zebedee, James and John, the very same disciples who accompanied him at his transfiguration; that they who had been witnesses of his glory might be witnesses also of his humiliation and affliction. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible (that is, if it be possible for man to be saved, and thy glory promoted as effectually in any other way as by my death) let this cup, this bitter cup of affliction, pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt. And he cometh unto his disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? you who so lately made such vehement professions of attachment to me! Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." Ye have need to watch and pray for your own sakes, as well as mine, that you may not be overcome by the severe trials that await you, nor be tempted to desert me. Yet at the same moment, feeling for the infirmity of human nature, he adds, "the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." That is, I know your hearts are right, and your intentions good; but the weakness of your frail nature overpowers your best resolutions, "and the thing which ye would ye do not." "He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. And he came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy.

And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on *now* and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going: behold, *he* is at hand that doth betray me." That is, henceforth, hereafter (for so the original strictly means) you may take your rest; your watching can be of no farther use to me: my trial is over, my agony is subdued, and my destiny determined. I shall soon be betrayed into the hands of sinners. Arise, therefore, let us go and meet this danger. Behold, he that betrayeth me is at hand.

This is the account given us of what is called our Saviour's agony in the garden; in the nature and circumstances of which there is certainly something "difficult to be understood;" but it is at the same time pregnant with instruction and consolation to every disciple of Christ.

We may observe, in the first place, that the terror and distress of our Lord's mind on this occasion seems to have been extreme, and the agony he endured, in the highest degree poignant and acute. He is said here to be "exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." St. Mark adds, that he was "sore amazed, and very heavy*;" and St. Luke tells us, that "being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground†." To what cause could these uncommonly painful sensations be owing? There is great reason to believe that they could not arise solely from the fear of death, or of the torments and the ignominy he was about to undergo; for many great and good men, many of the

* Ch. xiv. 33.

† Ch. xxii. 44.

primitive martyrs for instance, and of our first reformers, have met death and tortures without feeling, at least without expressing, such excessive terrors of mind as these.

But it should be considered, that besides the apprehensions of a death in the highest degree excruciating and disgraceful, to which in his human nature he would be as liable as any other person, there were several circumstances peculiar to himself, which might exceedingly embitter his feelings, and exasperate his sufferings.

In the first place, from the foreknowledge of every thing that could befall him, he would have a quicker sense and a keener perception of the torments he was to undergo than any other person could possibly have, from the anticipation of future sufferings.

In the next place, the complicated miseries which he knew that his death would bring upon his country, for which he manifested the tenderest concern; the distress in which it would plunge a mother and a friend that were infinitely dear to him; and the cruel persecutions and afflictions of various kinds, to which he foresaw that the first propagation of his religion would expose his beloved disciples; all these considerations, operating on a mind of such exquisite sensibility as his, must make a deep and painful impression, and add many a bitter pang to the anguish which preyed upon his soul. Nor is it at all improbable, that *his* great enemy and ours, the prince of darkness, whom he came to overthrow, and with whom he maintained a constant conflict through life, and triumphed over by his death; it is not, I say, at all improbable that this malignant being should exert his utmost power, by presenting real, and raising up

imaginary terrors to shake the constancy of his soul, and deter him from the great work he had undertaken. These, and a multitude of other agonizing distresses, unknown and inconceivable to us, which might necessarily spring from so vast, so momentous, so stupendous a work as the salvation of a whole world, make a plain distinction between our Saviour's situation and that of any other martyr to the cause of truth, and most clearly prove that there never was "a sorrow, in every respect, like unto his sorrow*." It is evident, indeed, that there was some other cause of his agony beside that of his approaching death; for it is said in the Epistle to the Hebrews, that he was *heard in that he feared*†; that is, was delivered from the terrors that oppressed him; and yet we know he was *not* delivered from the *death of the cross*.

And it should be observed in the last place, that notwithstanding his temporary agonies of mind; notwithstanding he was "sore amazed, and exceeding sorrowful, even unto death;" notwithstanding he prayed most earnestly and fervently "that the bitter cup of affliction might, if possible, pass away from him;" yet, upon the final result, he manifested the utmost firmness and fortitude of soul: and the constant termination of his prayer was, *not my will, but thine be done*. He submitted with the most perfect resignation to those very calamities which he felt so acutely, and deprecated so earnestly; and went out from the garden to meet the dangers that approached him with that noble and dignified address to his slumbering disciples, "Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me." It is evident then that this remarkable incident in the history of our

* Lam. i. 12.

† Heb. v. 7.

Lord, which has given occasion to so much unfounded and idle cavil, instead of lowering his character in the slightest degree, adds fresh lustre to it, and increases our veneration for his exalted virtues.

And what is of no less importance, it presents to us instructions the most edifying, and reflections the most consolatory to the weakness of our nature.

We see, in the first place, that our Lord did not pretend to that unfeeling heroism, that total insensibility to pain and affliction, which some of the ancient philosophers affected. On the contrary, in his human nature he felt like a man; he felt the weight of his own sorrows, and dropped the tear of sympathy for those of others. To those, therefore, who are oppressed and bowed down (as the best of men sometimes are) with a load of grief, who find, as the Psalmist expresses it, "their flesh and their heart failing," and their spirits sinking within them, it must be a most reviving consideration to reflect, that in this state even of extreme depression, there is no guilt; that it is no mark of God's displeasure; that even his beloved Son was no stranger to it; "that he was a man of sorrows, and well acquainted with grief; that therefore he is not a hard, unfeeling, obdurate master, who cannot be touched with our infirmities, but one who was in all things tried and afflicted as we are, yet without sin." He knows what sorrow is; he knows how hard it sometimes presses even on the firmest minds; and he will not fail to extend that relief to others, for which even he himself applied with so much fervency to the Father of all.

From his example, too, on this occasion, we learn what conduct we ought to observe when distress and misery overtake us. We are not only allowed, but

encouraged by what *he* did, to put up our petitions to the Throne of Grace for help in time of need. We are permitted to pray for the removal of our calamities with earnestness and with fervour; we may implore the Almighty that the bitter cup of affliction may pass away from us; but the conclusion must always be (what his was) “not my will, O my Father, but thine be done.” And one thing we may be assured of, that if the evils which overwhelm us are not removed, yet our supplications shall not be in vain; we shall at the least be enabled to bear them. And though we must not expect to have an angel sent from heaven to support us, as was done to Jesus, yet we may expect, and expect with confidence, that a more than angelic comforter, even the Spirit of God, will shed his healing influence over our souls, and preserve us from sinking even under the severest trials.

And there is still one farther lesson of no small importance, which this part of our Saviour’s history may teach us.

Extreme affliction, as we all but too well know, has a natural tendency, not only to depress our spirits, but to sour our tempers, and to render us fretful and irritable, and severe towards the failings of others. But how did it operate on our blessed Lord? Instead of injuring, it seemed rather to improve the heavenly mildness of his disposition, and to make him more indulgent to the failings of his followers. For when, in the very midst of all his anguish, they could so far forget his sorrows, and their own professions of attachment to him, as to sink into sleep, how gentle was his reproof to them for this want of sensibility and attention to him: “Could you not watch with me one hour?” And even this affectionate rebuke he immediately

tempers with a kind excuse for them: "the spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak."

I now proceed in the melancholy narrative. "And while he yet spake, lo! Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he: hold him fast. And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, Master; and kissed him. And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come? Then came they and laid hands on Jesus, and took him."

"And behold, one of them which were with Jesus (St. Peter) stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest (whose name was Malchus) and smote off his ear." Here again we see the warmth and vehemence of Peter's temper, which prompted him to a well-meant, though injudicious display of his zeal in his Master's cause. "Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into its place, for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?"

From this reproof to Peter, we are not to infer that the use of the sword in self-defence is unlawful; but that the use of it against the *magistrate* and the *ministers of justice* (which was the case in the present instance) is unlawful. It was meant also to check that propensity, which is but too strong and too apparent in a large part of mankind, to have recourse to the sword on *all* occasions; and more particularly to restrain private persons from avenging private

injuries, which they should rather leave to the magistrate or to God; for “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord*.” In all such cases, they who take the sword unjustly and rashly will probably, as our Saviour here forewarns them, perish with the sword; with the sword of their adversary, or of the magistrate. That denunciation might also allude to the Jews, who now seized on Jesus; and might be meant to intimate to his disciples, that it was perfectly needless for them to draw their swords on these miscreants, since they would all perish at the siege or capture of Jerusalem by the sword of the Romans.

If it had been the intention of Providence to protect Jesus and his religion by force, there is no doubt but a host of angels would have been sent to defend him, as one was actually sent to comfort him. But this would have defeated the very purpose for which he came into the world, which was, that he should “make his soul an offering for sin†.” The prophets foretold (more particularly Isaiah and Daniel) that he should do so. And beside this, nothing could be more abhorrent, from the spirit of his religion, than force, violence, and bloodshed. These instruments of destruction he left to fanatics and impostors. The only weapons he made use of were of a different nature; the sword of the Spirit, the shield of faith, and the armour of righteousness.

“In that same hour said Jesus to the multitude, Are ye come out as against a thief, with swords and staves, for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the Temple, and ye laid no hold on me. But all this was done that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled; (which, as I have already observed, pre-

* Rom. xii. 19.

† Isaiah liii. 10.

dicted his sufferings and his death.) Then all his disciples forsook him and fled." Here we have the exact completion of that prophecy which he had just before delivered, that all his disciples should be *offended* because of him; that is, should desert him that very night. And that this prediction was so accomplished, is clear beyond all controversy; because it was an event which the disciples would for their own credit gladly have suppressed, if they durst. By recording this event, they recorded their own weakness, their own pusillanimity. And we may be perfectly sure that they would not invent a falsehood on purpose to perpetuate their own disgrace. We have therefore, in this incident, a demonstrative proof, both that our Lord's prophecy was actually fulfilled, and that the evangelists were men of the strictest veracity and integrity, who were determined to sacrifice every thing, even their own reputation, to the sacred cause of truth.

Jesus being now in the possession of his enemies, they that had laid hold on him, led him away to Caiapha the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled. But Peter, though he had fled with the rest, yet ashamed of his cowardice, and still really attached to his Master, summoned up for the moment resolution enough to turn back and follow the crowd (but with cautious and trembling steps) to the palace of the high priest, "and went in, and sat with the servants in the hall of the palace, to see the end. Now the chief priests and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus to put him to death, but found none; yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none." Their object was to put Jesus to death; and for this purpose they sought out for false witnesses, to charge him with a *capital*

crime. To condemn any one to death, their own law required two witnesses; and it was also necessary for them to produce evidence sufficient to induce the Roman governor to ratify their sentence, without which it was of no avail. There was no difficulty in finding out and suborning false witnesses in abundance, who were perfectly well disposed to conform to their wishes; but for a long time they found none whose evidence came up to the point they aimed at; none who could prove against Jesus a capital offence. But at length, “came two false witnesses, and said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days.” Now to speak disrespectfully, or to prophesy against the temple, was considered by the Jews as *blasphemy*, and of course a capital offence. But the truth was, that Jesus said no such thing. The expressions alluded to by the witnesses were those he spoke, when, after casting the buyers and sellers out of the temple, the Jews asked him what sign he could give them of his authority to do those things? His answer was, not as the witnesses stated it, “I am able to destroy this temple;” but it was, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” So St. John expressly tells us*; and also, that by this temple he meant his own body, to which he probably pointed at the time. The high priest, sensible, perhaps, that even this evidence would not completely answer his purpose, proceeds to interrogate our Saviour, hoping that he might be drawn by artful questions to condemn himself. He arose, therefore, and said unto Jesus, “Answerest thou nothing? What is it that these witness against thee?” Is it true, or is it false? and what have

* Chap. ii. 19.

you to say in your own defence? But Jesus held his peace. He disdained to make any answer to such unfounded and contemptible accusations. He saw that his judges were predetermined; that every thing he could say would be of no avail; and that the only proper part for him to take, was to observe a dignified silence. The high priest perceiving this, had recourse to a measure which he knew must compel our Lord to speak: "I adjure thee," says he, "by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ the Son of God." This calling upon a man to swear by the living God was called the oath of adjuration, and was the Jewish mode of administering an oath, either to a witness or a criminal; and when so adjured, they were obliged to answer. Jesus now therefore conceived himself bound in conscience to break his silence, and said to the high priest, "Thou hast said;" that is, thou hast said what is true, I *am* the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God; for all these were synonymous terms among the Jews. But as our Lord's actual appearance and situation did but ill accord with a character of such high dignity, he proceeds to assure his judges, that what he affirmed was nevertheless unquestionably true; and that they themselves should in due time have the fullest proof of it. For, says he, "hereafter ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." Sitting at the right hand of power, means sitting at the right hand of God, to whom the Jews sometimes gave the appellation of *power*; and *coming in the clouds of heaven*, was, with the Jews, a characteristic mark of the Messiah. And the whole passage relates not to the final judgement, but to the coming of Christ to execute vengeance on the Jews in the de-

struction of Jerusalem by the Romans. "Then the high priest rent his clothes (a mark of extreme horror and indignation) saying, he hath spoken blasphemy by declaring himself the Christ the Son of God, and assuming all the marks of divine power. What farther need have we of witnesses? Behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy. What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death:" guilty of a crime that deserves death. "Then did they spit in his face and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands, saying, prophecy unto us; who is he that smote thee?"

Such were the indignities offered to the Lord of all, by his own infatuated creatures; and although he could with one word have laid them prostrate at his feet, yet he bore all these insults without a single murmur or complaint, and never once spake unadvisedly with his lips. "Though he was reviled, he reviled not again; though he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to Him that judgeth righteously*."

The evangelist now resumes the history of St. Peter, who while these things were transacting in the council-room, sat without in the palace; and a damsel came unto him, saying, "Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee. But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest. And when he was come out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, this fellow also was with Jesus of Nazareth. And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man. And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, surely thou also art one of them, for thy speech betrayeth thee. Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know

* 1 Pet. ii. 23.

not the man. And immediately the cock crew. And Peter remembered the words of Jesus, which said unto him, ‘Before the cock crow thou shalt deny me thrice.’ And he went out, and wept bitterly.”

This most interesting story is related by all the evangelists, with a few immaterial variations in each; but the substance is the same in all. There is, however, one circumstance added by St. Luke, so exquisitely beautiful and touching, that it well deserves to be noticed here. He tells us, that after Peter had denied Jesus thrice, “immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew; *and the Lord turned and looked upon Peter**.” What effect that look must have had on the heart and on the countenance of Peter, every one may, perhaps, in some degree conceive; but it is utterly impossible for any words to describe, or, I believe, even for the pencil of a Guido to express†. The sacred historian therefore most judiciously makes no attempt to work upon our passions or our feelings by any display of eloquence on the occasion. He simply relates the fact, without any embellishment or amplification; and only adds, “and Peter remembered the words of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice; and he went out and wept bitterly.”

The reflections that crowd upon the mind from this most affecting incident of Peter’s denial of his Master, are many and important; but I can only touch, and that slightly, on a few.

The first is, that this event in the history of St. Peter is a clear and striking accomplishment of our

* Chap. xxii. 61.

† In fact, I cannot learn that any great master has ever yet selected this incident as the subject of a picture.

Saviour's prediction, that before the cock crew he should deny him thrice. And it is very remarkable, that there are in this same chapter no less than four other prophecies of our Lord, which were all punctually fulfilled, some of them like this, within a few hours after they were delivered.

The next observation resulting from the fall of Peter is the melancholy proof it affords us of the infirmity of human nature, the weakness of our best resolutions, when left to ourselves, and the extreme danger of confiding too much in our own strength.

That St. Peter was most warmly attached to Jesus, that his intentions were upright, and his professions at the moment sincere, there can be no doubt. But his temper was too hot, and his confidence in himself too great. When our Lord told him, and all the other apostles, that they would desert him that night, Peter was the first to say to him, "though all men should be offended because of thee, yet will I *never* be offended." And when Jesus again assured him, that before the cock crew he should deny him thrice, Peter insisted with still greater vehemence on his unshaken fidelity, and declared, "that though he should die with him, he should never deny him." Yet deny him he did, with execrations and oaths; and left a memorable lesson, even to the best of men, not to entertain too high an opinion of their own constancy and firmness in the hour of temptation. "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."

And hence in the last place we see the wisdom and the necessity of looking beyond ourselves, of looking up to heaven for support and assistance in the discharge of our duty. If, when Peter was first forewarned by our Lord of his approaching denial of him, instead of

repeating his professions of inviolable fidelity to him, he had with all humility confessed his weakness, and implored his divine Master to strengthen and fortify him for the trial that awaited him, the event probably would have been very different. And it is surprising that he had not learned this lesson from his former experience. For when, confiding as he did now in his own courage, he entreated Jesus to let him walk to him upon the sea, and was permitted to do so; no sooner did he find the wind boisterous than he was afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me! and immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him." This was a plain intimation to him (as I remarked in a former Lecture) that it was not his own arm that could help him, but that almighty hand, and that outstretched arm, which then preserved him; and to which, when in danger, we must all have recourse to preserve us from sinking. "Trust then in the Lord," (as the wise king advises) "with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths*."

* Prov. iii. 5 & 6.

LECTURE XXII.

MATTHEW XXVII.

IN the preceding chapter we saw that the chief priests and elders had, in their summary way, without the shadow of justice, without any consistent evidence, decided the fate of Jesus, and pronounced him guilty of death. Their next care was how to get this sentence confirmed and carried into execution; for under the Roman government they had not at this time the power of the sword, the power of life and death; they could not *execute* a criminal, though they might try and condemn him, without a warrant from the Roman governor; they determined therefore to carry him before Pilate, the Roman procurator of Judæa at that time. But then, to ensure success in that quarter, it was necessary to give their accusations against Jesus such a colour and shape, as should prevail upon the governor to put him to death. For this purpose they found it expedient to change their ground, for they had condemned him for blasphemy; but this they knew would have little weight with a pagan governor, who, like Gallio, would “care for none of those things” which related solely to religion. They therefore resolved to bring him before Pilate as a *state prisoner*, and to charge him with treasonable and seditious practices; with

setting himself up as a king in opposition to Cæsar, and persuading the people not to pay tribute to that prince. Accordingly we are told, in the beginning of this chapter, that “when morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death;” that is, to obtain *permission* to put him to death; “and when they had bound him they led him away, and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor.”

The evangelist, having brought the history of this diabolical transaction thus far, makes a short digression, to inform us of the fate of that wretched traitor, Judas, who had by his perfidy brought his Master into this situation.

“Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? See thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and went and hanged himself.”

From the expression made use of in the third verse, “when Judas saw that Jesus was condemned, he *repented himself*,” some commentators have thought that he did not imagine or expect that Jesus would be condemned to death; but supposed either that he would convey himself away from his persecutors, or that he would prove his innocence to the satisfaction of his judges; or that at the most some slight punishment would be inflicted upon him. One would not wish to load even the worst of men with more guilt than really belongs to them; but from considering the character of Judas, and comparing together all the

circumstances of the case, it appears to me more probable that the acquittal or condemnation of Jesus never entered into his contemplation. All he thought of was gain. He had kept the common purse, and had robbed it; and his only object was, how to obtain a sum of money, which he determined to have at all events, and left consequences to take care of themselves. But when he saw that his divine Master, whom he knew to be perfectly innocent, was actually condemned to death, his conscience then flew in his face; his guilt rose up before him in all its horrors. The innocence, the virtues, the gentleness, the kindness of his Lord, with a thousand other circumstances, rushed at once upon his mind, and painted to him the enormity of his crime in such dreadful colours, that he could no longer bear the agonizing tortures that racked his soul, but went immediately and destroyed himself.

The answer of the chief priests to Judas, when he brought back to them the thirty pieces of silver, and declared that he had betrayed the innocent blood, was a perfectly natural one for men of their character: "What is that to us? See thou to that." Men who had any feeling, any sentiments of common humanity, or even of common justice, when so convincing a proof of the accused person's innocence had been given them, would naturally have relented, would have put an immediate stop to the proceedings, and released the prisoner. But this was very far from entering into their plan. With the guilt or innocence of Jesus they did not concern themselves. This was not their affair. All they wanted was the destruction of a man whom they hated and feared, and whose life and doctrine was a standing reproach to them. This was their object: and as to the mercy or the justice of the case,

on this head they were at perfect ease; “What is that to us? See thou to that.” And yet to see the astonishing inconsistency of human nature, and the strange contrivances by which even the most abandoned of men endeavour to satisfy their minds and quiet their apprehensions; these very men, who had no scruple at all in murdering an innocent person, yet had wonderful qualms of conscience about putting into the treasury the money which they themselves had given as the “*price of blood!*” “The chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for us to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter’s field, to bury strangers in. Wherefore that field was called The Field of Blood, unto this day. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value, and gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord appointed me*.”

I cannot pass on from this part of the chapter without observing, that the short account here given us of Judas Iscariot affords us a very striking proof of the perfect innocence and integrity of our Lord’s character, and of the truth of his pretensions.

Had there been any thing reprehensible in the former, or any deceit in the latter, it must have been known to Judas Iscariot. He was one of the twelve

* It happens that this passage is found not in Jeremiah, to which the evangelist refers, but in the eleventh chapter of Zechariah. But there are various very satisfactory ways in which learned men have accounted for this difficulty; which, after all, as the prophecy actually exists, is a matter of no moment, and in writings two or three thousand years old, it is no great wonder if, by the carelessness of transcribers, one name should sometimes (especially where abbreviations are used) be put for another.

who were the constant companions of our Saviour's ministry, and witnesses to every thing he said or did. If therefore his conduct had been in any respect irregular or immoral; if his miracles had been the effect of collusion or fraud; if there had been any plan concerted between him and his disciples to impose a false religion upon the world, and under the guise of piety to gratify their love of fame, honour, wealth, or power; if in short, Jesus had been either an enthusiast or an impostor, Judas must have been in the secret; and when he betrayed his Master, would immediately have divulged it to the world. By such a discovery, he would not only have justified his own treachery, but might probably have gratified also his ruling passion, his love of money. For there can be no doubt, that when the chief priests and rulers were industriously seeking out for evidence against Jesus, they would most gladly have purchased that of Judas at any price, however extravagant, that he chose to demand. But instead of producing any evidence *against* Jesus, he gives a voluntary and most decisive evidence in his favour. "I have sinned," says he, in an agony of grief; "I have sinned, and have betrayed the innocent blood." This testimony of Judas is invaluable, because it is the testimony of an unwilling witness; the testimony not of a friend, but of an enemy; the testimony, not of one desirous to favour and to befriend the accused, but of one who had actually betrayed him. After such an evidence as this, it seems impossible for any ingenuous mind either to question the reality of our Saviour's miracles, or the divinity to which he laid claim; because, as Judas declared him *innocent* (which he could not be, had he in any respect *deceived* his disciples,) he must have been, what he assumed to be, the Son of God, and his religion, the word of God.

After this account of Judas Iscariot, the evangelist proceeds in the history.

“ And Jesus *stood before the governor.*” Little did that governor imagine who it was that then stood before him. Little did he suspect that he must himself one day stand before the tribunal of that very person whom he was then going to judge as a criminal!

It appears from the parallel place in St. Luke (and from what was stated in the preceding Lecture) that the charge brought against Jesus before Pilate was not what it had been before the chief priests, blasphemy, but sedition and treason. “ They began to accuse him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, saying, that he himself is Christ a king*.” These were great crimes against the state, as affecting both the revenue and the sovereignty of the Roman emperor, both of which it was the duty of the governor to support and maintain. “ Pilate therefore asked him, Art thou the king of the Jews? And Jesus said unto him, Thou sayest.” That is, I am what thou sayest. “ And when he was accused of the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing. Then said Pilate unto him, Hearest thou not how many things those witness against thee? And he answered him never a word; insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly.” Our Lord’s conduct on this occasion was truly dignified. When he was called upon to acknowledge what was really true, he gave a direct answer both to the chief priests and to Pilate. He acknowledged that he was the Christ, the Son of God, the King of the Jews; but false and frivolous, and unjust accusations, he treated as they deserved, with profound and contemptuous silence.

* Luke xxiii. 2.

It appears, however, from St. John, that although Jesus declared that he was the King of the Jews, yet he explained to Pilate the nature of his kingdom, which he assured him was not of this world. And Pilate, satisfied with this explanation, and seeing clearly that the whole accusation was malicious and groundless, made several efforts to save Jesus. He repeatedly declared to his accusers, that having examined him, he could find no fault in him. This, however, instead of disarming their fury, only inflamed and increased it. They were the more fierce, as St. Luke tells us, saying, “He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee, to this place*.” The mention of Galilee suggested an idea to Pilate, which he flattered himself might save him the pain of condemning an innocent man. “When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked whether the man were a Galilean; and as soon as he knew that he belonged unto Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod †.” That tyrant, who was delighted to see Jesus, and was probably very well disposed to treat him as he did his precursor, John the Baptist, yet could bring no guilt home to him. He therefore sent him back to Pilate, insulted and derided, but uncondemned. Pilate, not yet discouraged, had recourse to another expedient, which he hoped might still preserve a plainly guiltless man. It was the custom, at the great Feast of the Passover, for the Roman governor to gratify the Jewish people, by pardoning and releasing to them any prisoner whom they chose to select out of those that were condemned to death. Now there happened to be at that time a notorious criminal in prison, named Barabbas, who had been

* Luke xxiii. 5.

† Id. 6, 7.

guilty of exciting an insurrection, and committing murder in it. Pilate, thinking it impossible that the people could carry their malignant rage against Jesus so far as to desire the pardon of a murderer rather than of him, said unto them, "Whom will ye that I release unto you, Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ?" Had the people been left to their own unbiassed feeling, one would think that they could not have hesitated one moment in their choice. But they were under the influence of leaders (as they generally are) more wicked than themselves. For we are told, that "the chief priests and elders *persuaded* the multitude that they should ask Barabbas and destroy Jesus*."

While this was passing, an extraordinary incident took place, which must needs have made a deep impression on the mind of Pilate. "When he was sat down upon the judgement-seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man; for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him." Anxious as Pilate already was to save Jesus, this singular circumstance coming upon him at the moment, must have greatly quickened his zeal in such a cause. He therefore redoubled his efforts to carry his point, and again said to the Jews, "Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas." Pilate still persisted, "What shall I do then with Jesus, which is called CHRIST?" that is, the Messiah, the great deliverer whom they expected; thinking this consideration might soften them. But he was mistaken; they all say unto him, "Let him be crucified." Once more he endeavoured to move their compassion, by reminding them of the perfect innocence of Jesus. The

* Matt. xxvii. 20.

governor said unto them, “ Why? what evil hath he done?” But even this last affecting remonstrance was all in vain; they cried out the more, saying, “ Let him be crucified.” When therefore Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, “ I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it.” This was a custom both among the Jews and the Romans, when they wished to exculpate themselves from the guilt of having put to death an innocent man. We meet with instances of this significant ablution in several classic writers*. The Mosaic law itself enjoined it in certain cases†; and it is in allusion to this ceremony that David says in the Psalms, “ I will wash my hands in innocency, O Lord; (that is, in testimony of my innocence) and so will I go to thine altar ‡.”

This therefore was at once a visible declaration of the innocence of Jesus, and of Pilate’s reluctance in condemning him. To this the Jews made that answer, which must petrify every heart with horror. “ Then answered all the people, and said, *His blood be on us and on our children.* Then released he Barabbas unto them: and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.”

Here let us pause a moment, and look back to the scene we have been contemplating, and the reflections that arise from it.

* Sophocles—Ajax iii. i. v. 664; & Scholias in loco. So Æneas, after having recently slaughtered so many of his enemies at the sacking of Troy by the Greeks, durst not touch his household gods, till he had washed himself in the running stream.

Me, bello ò tanto digressum et cæde recenti,

Attractare nefas; donec me flumine vivo

Ablucro.—Æn. l. ii. v. 718.

† Deut. xxi. 6, 7.

‡ Psalm xxvi. 6.

It affords, in the first place, a most awful warning to the lower orders of the people, to beware of giving themselves up, as they too frequently do, to the direction of artful and profligate leaders, who abuse their simplicity and credulity to the very worst purposes, and make use of them only as tools, to accomplish their own private views of ambition, of avarice, of resentment, or revenge. We have just seen a most striking instance of this strange propensity of the multitude to be misled, and of the ease with which their passions are worked up to the commission of the most atrocious crimes. The Jewish people were naturally attached to Jesus. They were astonished at his miracles, they were charmed with his discourses; and their diseases and infirmities were relieved by his omnipotent benevolence. But notwithstanding all this, by the dexterous management of their chief priests and elders, their admiration of Jesus was converted in a moment into the most rancorous hatred; they were *persuaded* to ask the life of a murderer in preference to his; and to demand the destruction of a man who had never offended them, whose innocence was as clear as the day, and was repeatedly acknowledged and strongly urged upon them by the very judge who had tried him.

Yet even that judge himself, who was so thoroughly convinced of the innocence of his prisoner, and actually used every means in his power to preserve him, even he had not the honesty and the courage to protect him effectually; and his conduct affords a most dreadful proof what kind of a thing public justice was among the most *enlightened*, and (if we may believe their own poets and historians) the most *virtuous* people in the ancient heathen world. We see a Roman governor sent to dispense justice in a Roman province, and

invested with full powers to save or to destroy; we see him with a prisoner before him, in whom he repeatedly declared he could find no fault; and yet, after a few ineffectual struggles with his own conscience, he delivers up that prisoner, not merely to death, but to the most horrible and excruciating torments that human malignity could devise. The fact is, he was afraid of the people, he was afraid of Cæsar; and when the clamorous multitude cried out to him, "If thou let this man go thou art not Cæsar's friend," all his firmness, all his resolution at once forsook him. He shrunk from the dangers that threatened him, and sacrificed his conscience and his duty to the menaces of a mob, and the dread of sovereign power.

Could any thing like this have happened in this country? We all know that it is impossible. We all know that no dangers, no threats, no fears, either of Cæsar or of the people, could ever induce a British judge to condemn to death a man, whom he in his conscience believed to be innocent. And what is it that produces this difference between a Roman and a British judge? It is this: that the former had no other principle to govern his conduct but natural reason, or what would now be called philosophy; which, though it would sometimes point out to him the path of duty, yet could never inspire him with fortitude enough to persevere in it in critical and dangerous circumstances; in opposition to the frowns of a tyrant, or the clamours of a multitude. Whereas the British judge, in addition to his natural sentiments of right and wrong, and the dictates of the moral sense, has the principle of *religion* also to influence his heart: he has the unerring and inflexible rules of evangelical rectitude to guide him; he has that which will vanquish

every other fear, the *fear of God*, before his eyes. He knows that he himself must one day stand before the Judge of all; and *that* consideration keeps him firm to his duty, be the dangers that surround ever so formidable and tremendous.

This is one, among a thousand other proofs, of the benefits we derive, even in the present life, from the Christian revelation. It has, in fact, had a most salutary and beneficial influence on our most important *temporal* interests. Its beneficent spirit has spread itself through all the different relations and modifications of human society, and communicated its kindly influence to almost every public and private concern of mankind. It has not only purified, as we have seen, the administration of justice; but it has insensibly worked itself into the inmost frame and constitution of civil societies. It has given a tinge to the complexion of their governments, and to the temper of their laws. It has softened the rigour of despotism, and lessened, in some degree, the horrors of war. It has descended into families, has diminished the pressure of private tyranny, improved every domestic endearment, given tenderness to the parent, humanity to the master, respect to superiors, to inferiors security and ease; and left, in short, the most evident traces of its benevolent spirit in all the various subordinations, dependencies, and connexions of social life.

But to return to the Roman governor. Having thus basely shrunk from his duty, and, contrary to his own conviction, condemned an innocent man, he endeavoured to clear himself from this guilt, and to satisfy his conscience, by the vain ceremony of washing his hands before the multitude, and declaring, “that he was innocent of the blood of that just person.” Alas!

not all the water of the ocean could wash away the foul and indelible stain of murder from his soul. Yet he hoped to transfer it to the accomplices of his crime. "See ye to it," says he to the people. And what answer did that people make to him? "*His blood, said they, be on us, and on our children.*" A most fatal imprecation, and most dreadfully fulfilled upon them at the siege of Jerusalem, when the vengeance of Heaven overtook them with a fury unexampled in the history of the world; when they were exposed at once to the horrors of famine, of sedition, of assassination, and the sword of the Romans. And it is very remarkable, that there was a striking correspondence between their crime and their punishment. They put Jesus to death, when the nation was assembled to celebrate the passover; and, when the nation was assembled for the same purpose, Titus shut them up within the walls of Jerusalem. The rejection of the true Messiah was their crime, and the following of false Messiahs to their destruction was their punishment. They bought Jesus as a slave, and they themselves were afterwards sold and bought as slaves, at the lowest prices. They preferred a robber and murderer to Jesus, whom they crucified between two thieves; and they themselves were afterwards infested with bands of thieves and robbers. They put Jesus to death lest the Romans should come and take away their place and nation; and the Romans *did* come and take away their place and nation*. And what is still more striking, and still more strongly marks the judgement of God upon them, they were punished with that very kind of death which they were so eager to inflict on the Saviour of mankind, the death of the cross; and that in such prodigious

* Newton on Prophecy, vol. ii. p. 354.

numbers, that Josephus assures us there wanted wood for crosses, and room to place them in*.

The history then proceeds as follows:

“Then released he Barabbas unto them; and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified. It was the custom of the inhuman Romans to scourge their criminals before they crucified them; as if the exquisite tortures of crucifixion were not sufficient without adding to them those of the scourge. But in this instance the Roman soldiers went farther still; they improved upon the cruelty of their masters, and to torments they added the most brutal mockery and insult. “Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers; and they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe. And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand; and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, king of the Jews! And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head. And after they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to be crucified.” One hastens over the scene of insolence and outrage with averted eyes, and can hardly bring one’s mind to believe that any thing in the shape of man could have risen to this height of wanton barbarity. What a difference between this treatment of an innocent and injured man, to that of the vilest criminal in this country previous to his execution; and how strongly does it mark the difference between the spirit of Paganism and the spirit of Christianity! “And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him

* De Bell. Jud. l. v. c. xi. p. 1247. ed. Huds.

they compelled to bear his cross." It was usual for criminals to bear their own cross; but when they were feeble (as the blessed Jesus might well be after all his bitter sufferings) they compelled some one to bear it for him; and this Cyrenian was probably known to be a favourer of Christ. "And when they were come to a place called Golgotha, they gave him vinegar to drink, mingled with gall; a kind of stupefying potion, intended to abate the sense of pain, and to hasten death. "And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots." This is a prediction of king David's, in the 22d Psalm. "And sitting down, they watched him there; and set up over him his accusation, written, *This is Jesus, the King of the Jews:*" for in extraordinary cases it was usual to place such inscriptions over the criminal. But with regard to this, a remarkable circumstance occurred. We learn from St. John, that many of the Jews read this inscription, which gave them infinite offence; as being a declaration to all the world that Jesus really *was* their king. The chief priests therefore came to Pilate, and begged of him to alter the inscription; and instead of writing, "*This is the King of the Jews,*" to write, "*He said I am the King of the Jews.*" Pilate, who put up this inscription out of mockery, now retained it, like a true Roman, out of obstinacy, "What I have written, (says he, peevishly) I have written;" and it *shall* stand; unconscious of what he was saying, and of his being overruled all the while by an unseen hand, which thus compelled him to bear an undesigned testimony to a most important truth; that the very man whom he had crucified

as a malefactor, did not merely *say* that he was the King of the Jews, the true Messiah, but that he really *was* so.

“Then were two thieves crucified with him, the one on the right hand, the other on the left.” This was done with a view of adding to the ignominy of our Saviour’s sufferings. But this act of malignity, like many other instances of the same nature, answered a purpose which the authors of it little thought of or intended. It was the completion of a prophecy of Isaiah, in which, alluding to this very transaction, he says of the Messiah, “he was numbered with the transgressors*.” They then continued their insults upon him, even while hanging in agony upon the cross, as we find related in the five following verses. We are then told, that from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour.” The sixth hour of the Jews corresponds to our twelve o’clock, and their ninth hour of course to our three. There was therefore a darkness over all the earth, from twelve at noon till three in the afternoon. This darkness must have been supernatural and miraculous. It could not be an eclipse of the sun, because that cannot happen but in the new moon; whereas this was at the feast of the Passover, which was always celebrated at the full moon. It is taken notice of by several ancient writers, both Heathen and Christian; and Tertullian expressly declares, that it was mentioned in the Roman archives †. From whence it appears, that it was not confined to the land of Judæa, but extended itself, as it is expressed by St. Luke, *over all the earth* ‡.

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” that is

* Isaiah liii. 12.

† Tertull. Apol. c. 21.

‡ Luke xxiii. 44.

to say, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" We are not from hence to imagine, that Jesus meant by these words to express any distrust of God's favour and kindness towards him, or any apprehension that the light of his countenance was withdrawn from him. This was impossible. He well knew, that under that load of affliction, which, for the salvation of mankind, he voluntarily took upon himself, he was still his heavenly Father's "beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased." These expressions, therefore, of seeming despondence, were nothing more than the natural and almost unavoidable effusions of a mind tortured with the acutest pain, and hardly conscious of the complaints it uttered; of which many similar instances occur in the Psalms. Indeed these words themselves are the beginning of the 22nd Psalm, which perhaps our Lord recited throughout, or at least undoubtedly meant to apply the whole of it to himself. And this very Psalm, although in the outset it breathes an air of dejection and complaint, yet ends in expressing the firmest trust in the mercy and the protection of God. And our Lord himself, when he breathed his last, committed himself with boundless confidence to the care of the Almighty: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit*."

Then some of them that stood there, when they heard him crying out "Eli, Eli," deceived by the similitude of the sound, said, "This man calleth for Elias. And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink." This, as St. John tells us, was done in consequence of Jesus saying, "I thirst." The rest said, "Let be; let us see whether Elias will

* Luke, xxiii. 46.

come to save him." "Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, gave up the ghost." This was about the ninth hour, or three in the afternoon. And as he was crucified at the third hour, or at nine in the morning, he had hung no less than six hours in agonies upon the cross. And this, let it never be forgotten, was for us men, and for our salvation! "And behold the veil of the temple was rent in twain, from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent, and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept, arose and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many."

Such were the convulsions into which the whole frame of nature was thrown, when the Lord of all yielded up his life.

The veil of the temple we are told, in the first place, was rent in twain from top to the bottom.

The Jewish temple was divided into several parts; the most sacred was called the Holiest, or the *Holy of Holies*, into which none but the high-priest might enter, and that only once in a year. It was considered as a type of heaven; and was separated from what was called the holy place, or the place where divine worship was celebrated, by a curtain of rich tapestry, which is here called the veil of the Temple. This veil, when our Saviour expired, was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; by which was signified the abolition of the whole Mosaic ritual, the removal of the partition between Jew and Gentile, and the admission of the latter (on the terms of the gospel covenant) into heaven, or the *Holy of Holies*. "And the earth did quake, and the rocks rent." This earthquake is mentioned by heathen authors as having, in the reign of

Tiberius, destroyed twelve cities in Asia*. “And the graves were opened, and many bodies of the saints which slept, arose and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.” Who the holy persons were which then arose from their graves must be matter of mere conjecture; but most probably some of those who had believed in Christ, such as old Simeon, and whose persons were known in the city.

Now when the centurion, and they that were with him watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, “Truly this was the Son of God.”

The centurion here mentioned was the Roman captain, who, with a guard of soldiers, was ordered to attend the crucifixion of Jesus, and see the sentence executed. He placed himself, as St. Mark informs us, over against Jesus. From that station he kept his eye constantly fixed upon him, and observed with attention every thing he said or did. And when he saw the meekness, the patience, the resignation, the firmness, with which our Lord endured the most excruciating torments; when he heard him at one time fervently praying for his murderers, at another disposing with dignity and authority of a place in Paradise to one of his fellow-sufferers; and at length, with that confidence, which nothing but conscious virtue and conscious dignity could at such a time inspire, recommending his spirit into the hands of his heavenly Father; he could not but conclude him to be a most extraordinary person, and something more than human. But when, moreover, he observed the astonishing events that took place when Jesus expired; the agitation into which

* Taciti Annal, l. ii. c. 37. Suet. in Tib. vi. 448. Plin. Nat. Hist. l. ii. c. 84.

the whole frame of nature seemed to be thrown; the supernatural darkness, the earthquake, the rending of rocks, the opening of graves; he then burst out involuntarily into that striking exclamation. "Truly this was the Son of God."

Here then we have a testimony to the divine character of our Lord, which must be considered as in the highest degree impartial and incorrupt; the honest unsolicited testimony of a plain man, a soldier and a heathen; the testimony, not of one who was prejudiced in favour of Christ and his religion, but of one who, by habit and education, was probably strongly prejudiced against them.

And it is not a little remarkable, that the contemplation of the very same scene which so forcibly struck the Roman centurion, has extorted a similar confession from one of the most eloquent of modern sceptics, who has never been accused of too much credulity, and who, though he could bring himself to resist the evidence both of prophecy and of miracles, and was therefore certainly no bigot to Christianity, yet was overwhelmed with the evidence arising from the character, the sufferings, and the death of Jesus. I allude to the celebrated comparison between the death of Socrates and the death of Jesus, drawn by the masterly pen of Rousseau. The passage is probably well known to a large part of this audience; but it affords so forcible and so unprejudiced a testimony to the divinity of Christ, and bears so striking a resemblance to that of the centurion, that I shall be pardoned, I trust, for bringing it once more to your recollection, and introducing it here as the conclusion of this Lecture.

"Where (says he) is the man, where is the philosopher, who can act, suffer, and die, without weakness,

and without ostentation? When Plato describes his imaginary just man, covered with all the opprobrium of guilt, yet at the same time meriting the sublimest rewards of virtue, he paints precisely every feature in the character of Jesus Christ. The resemblance is so striking that all the fathers have observed it, and it is impossible to be deceived in it. What prejudice, what blindness must possess the mind of that man, who *dares* to compare the son of Sophroniscus with the Son of Mary! What a distance is there between the one and the other! The death of Socrates, philosophizing calmly with his friends, is the most gentle that can be wished; that of Jesus, expiring in torments, insulted, derided, and reviled by all the people, the most horrible that can be imagined. Socrates, taking the poisoned cup, blesses the man who presents it to him; and who, in the very act of presenting it, melts into tears. Jesus, in the midst of the most agonizing tortures, prays for his enraged persecutors. Yes, if the life and death of Socrates are those of a sage, the life and death of Jesus are those of a GOD."

LECTURE XXIII.



MATTHEW XXVII—XXVIII.

IN the preceding Lecture we closed the dismal scene of our Lord's unparalleled sufferings; on which it is impossible to reflect without astonishment and horror, and without asking ourselves this question, Whence came it to pass that so innocent, so excellent, so divine a person as the beloved Son of God, in whom he was well pleased, should be permitted by his heavenly Father to be exposed to such indignities and cruelties, and finally to undergo the exquisite torments of the cross? The answer is, that the occasion of all this is to be sought for in our own sinful nature, in the depravity and corruption of the human heart, in the extreme wickedness of every kind which overspread the whole world at the time of our Lord's appearance upon earth, and which must necessarily have subjected the whole human race to the severest effects of the divine displeasure, had not some atonement, some expiation, some satisfaction to their offended Maker, been interposed between them and the punishment so justly due to them. This expiation, this atonement, the Son of God himself voluntarily consented to become, and paid the ransom required for our deliverance by his own death upon the cross. "He gave himself for us, as the

universe, as voluntarily to undertake the great and arduous and painful task of rescuing them from sin and misery, and eternal death; that for this purpose he should condescend to quit the bosom of his Father and the joys of heaven; should divest himself of the glory that he had before the world began; should not only take upon himself the nature of man, but the form of a servant; should submit to a low and indigent condition, to indignities, to injuries and insults, and at length to a disgraceful and excruciating death, is indeed a mystery, but it is a mystery of kindness and of mercy; it is, as the apostle truly calls it, “ a love that passeth knowledge* ; a degree of tenderness, pity, and condescension, to which we have neither words nor conceptions in any degree equal. It is impossible for us not to cry out on this occasion with the Psalmist, “ Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him† ?”

But what effect should this reflection have upon our hearts? Should it dispose us to join with the disputer of this world in doubting or denying the wisdom of the Almighty in the mode of our redemption, and in quarrelling with the means he has made use of to save us, because they appear to our weak understanding strange and unaccountable? Shall the man who is sinking under a mortal disease refuse the medicine which will infallibly restore him, because he is ignorant of the ingredients of which it is composed? Shall the criminal who is condemned to death reject the pardon that is unexpectedly offered to him, because he cannot conceive in what manner and by what means it was obtained for him? Shall we, who are all criminals in the sight of God, and are all actually (till redeemed by

* Ephes. iii. 19.

† Psalm viii. 4.

Christ) under the sentence of death; shall we strike back the arm that is graciously stretched out to save us, merely because the mercy offered to us is so great that we are unable to grasp with our understanding the whole nature and extent of it? Shall the very magnitude, in short, of the favour conferred upon us, be converted into an argument against receiving it; and shall we determine not to be saved because God chuses to do it, not in our way, but his own? That our redemption by Christ is a mystery, a great and astonishing mystery, we readily acknowledge. But this was naturally to be expected in a work of such infinite difficulty as that of rendering the mercy of God in pardoning mankind, consistent with the exercise of his justice, and the support of his authority, as the moral Governor of the world. Whatever could effect this, must necessarily be something far beyond the comprehension of our narrow understandings; that is, must necessarily be mysterious. And therefore this very circumstance, instead of shocking our reason, and staggering our faith, ought to confirm the one, and satisfy the other.

After the crucifixion of our Lord follows the account of his burial by Joseph of Arimathea, who went to Pilate and begged the body of Jesus; and having obtained it, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out of the rock; and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed. On this I shall make no other observation than that it was the exact fulfilment of a prophecy in Isaiah, where, speaking of the promised Messiah, or Christ, it is said, “ he shall make his grave with the rich*.” And accordingly Joseph,

* Isaiah liii. 9.

we are told, was a rich man, and an honourable counsellor*.

Now the next day that followed the day of the preparation (that is, on the Saturday) the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, "Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, after three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night and steal him away, and say unto the people, he is risen from the dead; so the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch, go your way, make it as sure as you can. So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone and setting a watch †."

Here we see the chief priests using every possible precaution to prevent a fraud. For this purpose they went to Pilate to beg for a guard, immediately after our Lord was buried. It is indeed here said that they went *the next day that followed the day of the preparation*, the day on which Jesus was crucified. This looks, at the first view, as if the sepulchre had remained one whole night without a guard. But this was not so. The chief priests went to Pilate as soon as the sun was set on Friday, the day of the preparation and crucifixion; for then began the following day, or Saturday; as the Jews always began to reckon their day from the preceding evening. They had a guard therefore as soon as they possibly could, after the body was deposited in the sepulchre: and one cannot help admiring the wisdom of Providence in so disposing events, that the extreme anxiety of these men, to prevent collusion, should be the means of adding the

* Matt. xxvii. 57. Mark xv. 43.

† Matt. xxvii. 62—66.

testimony of sixty unexceptionable witnesses (the number of the Roman soldiers on guard) to the truth of the resurrection, and of establishing the reality of it beyond all power of contradiction. It is only necessary to add on this head, that the circumstance of sealing the stone was a precaution of which several instances occur in ancient times, particularly in the prophecy of Daniel, where we read, that when Daniel was thrown into the den of lions, a stone was brought and laid upon the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet, and with the signet of his lords, that the purpose might not be changed concerning Daniel* . .

The chief priest having taken these precautions, waited probably with no small impatience for the third day after the crucifixion, when Jesus had foretold that he should rise again, but when they made no doubt, that they should find the body in the sepulchre, and convict him of deceit and imposture.

On the other hand, it might naturally be imagined that the disciples, after having received from their Lord repeated assurances that he would rise on the third day from the dead, would anxiously look for the arrival of that day, with a certain confidence that these promises would be fulfilled, and that they should see their beloved Master rescued from the grave, and restored to life.

But this seems to have been by no means the real state of their minds. It does not appear that they entertained any hopes of Jesus' resurrection. Shocked and confounded, and dismayed at finding him condemned to the ignominious death of the cross, they forgot every thing he had said to them respecting his

* Daniel vi. 17.

rising again. When therefore he was led to punishment, they all forsook him, and fled. Most of them seem to have kept themselves concealed during the whole time of Jesus' being in the grave, and to have given themselves up to sorrow and despair. They had not even the courage or the curiosity to go to the sepulchre on the third day, to see whether the promised event had taken place or not. When two of them going to Emmaus met Jesus, their conversation plainly showed that they were disappointed in their expectations, "We trusted (said they) that it had been he which should have delivered Israel;*" and when the women who had been at the sepulchre told the apostles that Jesus was risen, "their words seemed to them as *idle tales*, and they believed them not †."

The women, it is true, came to the sepulchre early in the morning of the third day; but they came to embalm the dead body, and of course not with the hope of seeing a living one.

So far then is perfectly clear, that the disciples were not at all disposed to be *over-credulous* on this occasion. Their prejudices and prepossessions lay the contrary way; and nothing but the most irresistible evidence would be able to convince them of a fact, which they appeared to think in the highest degree improbable.

Let us now then see what this evidence of the resurrection was. In the beginning of the 28th chapter, on which we are now entering, St. Matthew informs us, "that in the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn towards the first day of the week," that is, according to our way of reckoning, very early on the Sunday morning (our Lord having been crucified on the Friday)

* Luke xxiv. 21.

† Luke xxiv. 11.

“ came Mary Magdalen, and the other Mary, the mother of James and Joses, to see the sepulchre; and, as we learn from the other evangelists, they brought with them the spices they had purchased to embalm the body of Jesus. And behold there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow. And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye; for I know that ye seek Jesus which was crucified. He is not here; for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay; and go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him. Lo! I have told you. And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy, and did run to bring his disciples word. And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, *All hail*; and they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid. Go, tell my brethren, that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me*.”

This is the relation given by St. Matthew of our Lord's first appearance, after his resurrection, to the women who came to the sepulchre. The accounts given by the other three evangelists are substantially the same, though differing in a few minute circumstances of no moment; which however have been very ably reconciled by many learned men. I shall therefore wave all discussions of this kind, and confine myself to the main fact of the resurrection, in which

* Matt. xxviii. 1—10.

all the evangelists agree, and of which the proofs are numerous and clear.

The principal and most obvious are those which arise from the various appearances which Jesus made after his resurrection to various persons, and at various times.

The first was to Mary Magdalen alone*.

The second, to her in company with several other women, as we have just seen †.

The third to Peter ‡.

The fourth, to the two disciples going to Emmaus §.

The fifth to the apostles in Jerusalem, when they were assembled with the doors shut on the first day of the week; at which time he showed them his hands and his feet, pierced with the nails; and did eat before them ||.

The sixth, to the apostles a second time, as they sat at meat, when he satisfied the doubts of the incredulous Thomas, by making him thrust his hand into his side ¶.

The seventh, to Peter and several of his disciples at the lake of Tiberias, when he also ate with them **.

The eighth, and last, was to above five hundred brethren at once ††.

There are no less than eight distinct appearances of our Lord to his disciples after his resurrection, recorded by the sacred historians. And can we believe that all those different persons could be deceived in these appearances of one, whose countenance, figure, voice, and manner they had for so long a time been perfectly well acquainted with; and who now, not merely

* Mark xvi. 9.

† Matt. xxviii. 9.

‡ 1 Cor. xv. 5.

§ Luke xxiv. 13.

|| John xx. 19. Luke xxiv. 37—43.

¶ John xx. 26.

** John xxi. 1.

†† 1 Cor. xv. 6.

presented himself to their view transiently and silently, but ate and drank and conversed with them, and suffered them to touch and examine him thoroughly, that they might be convinced by all their senses that it was truly their beloved Master, and not a spirit that conversed with them. In all this surely it is impossible that there could be any delusion or imposition. Was it then a tale invented by the disciples to impose upon others? Why they should do this it is not easy to conceive; because it would have been an imposition, not only on others, but on themselves. It would have been an attempt to persuade themselves that their Master was risen, when he really was not; from whence no possible benefit could arise to them, but, on the contrary, grief, disappointment, and mortification in the extreme. But besides this, the narratives themselves of this great event bear upon the very face of them the strongest marks of reality and truth. They describe, in so natural a manner, the various emotions of the disciples on their first hearing of our Lord's resurrection, that no one who is acquainted with the genuine workings of the human mind, can possibly suspect any thing like fraud in the case. When the women were first told by the angels that Christ was risen, and were ordered to tell the disciples, they departed quickly from the sepulchre *with fear and great joy**; with joy at the unexpected good news they had just heard; and with fear, not only from the sight of the angel, but lest the glad tidings he had told them should not prove true. They therefore "trembled, and were amazed, and ran to bring the disciples word; neither said they any thing to any man, for they were afraid †." And when they told these things to the

* Matt. xxviii. 8.

† Mark xvi. 8.

apostles, their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not*. When Jesus himself appeared to the apostles at Jerusalem, they were terrified and affrighted, and thought they had seen a spirit; and they believed not for joy, and wondered †. When he appeared again unto the eleven as they sat at meat, they were so incredulous that he upbraided them with their unbelief ‡, and Thomas would not be convinced without thrusting his hand into his side §. This certainly was not the behaviour of men who were fabricating an artful story, to impose upon the world, but of men who were themselves astonished, and overpowered with an event which they did not in the least expect, and which it was with the utmost difficulty they could be brought to believe.

The account therefore of the resurrection given by the evangelists, may safely be relied upon as true.

It may however be said, that this account is the representation of friends, of those who were interested in asserting the reality of a resurrection; but that there is probably another story told by the opposite party, by the Jews and the Romans, which may set the matter in a very different point of view; and that before we can judge fairly of the question, we must hear what these have to say upon it as well as the evangelists. This is certainly very proper and reasonable. There *is*, we acknowledge, another account given by the Jews, respecting the resurrection of Christ: and, to show the perfect fairness and impartiality of the sacred historians, and how little they wish to shrink from the severest investigation of the truth, they themselves tell us what this opposite story was. In the 11th verse of this chapter, St. Matthew informs us, “that as the women were going to tell the

* Luke xxiv. 11. † Luke xxiv. 37–41. ‡ Mark xvi. 14. § John xx. 27.

disciples that Jesus was risen, behold some of the watch came into the city, and showed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, Say ye, his disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him and secure you. So they took the money, and did as they were taught. And this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day."

This then is the statement of our adversaries, produced in opposition to that of the evangelists; which the latter simply relate without any observation upon it, without condescending to make the slightest answer to it, but leaving every man to judge of it for himself. And this indeed they might safely do: for it is a fabrication too gross and too palpable to impose on any man of common sense. If any person can bring himself to believe that sixty Roman soldiers should be all sleeping at the same time on guard; that they should be able to tell what was done in their sleep; that they should have the boldness to confess that they slept upon their post, when they knew the punishment of such an offence to be death; and that the disciples should be so devoid of all common sense as to steal away a dead body, which could not be of the smallest use to them, and, instead of proving a resurrection, was a standing proof against it; if any man, I say, can prevail on himself to listen for a moment to such absurdities as these, he may then give credit to the tale of the soldiers: but otherwise must treat it, as it truly deserves, with the most sovereign contempt.

This senseless forgery, then, being set aside, and

the body of Jesus being gone, and yet *never having being produced* by the Jews or Romans; there remains only the alternative of *a real resurrection*.

But besides the positive proofs of this fact which have been here stated, there is a presumptive one of the most forcible nature, to which I have never yet seen any answer, and am of opinion that none can be given. The proof I allude to is that which is drawn from the sudden and astonishing change which took place in the language and the conduct of the apostles, immediately after the period when they affirmed that Jesus had risen from the dead. From being, as we have seen, timorous and dejected, and discouraged at the death of their Master, they suddenly became courageous, undaunted, and intrepid: and they boldly preached that very Jesus, whom before they had deserted in his greatest distress. This observation will apply, in some degree, to all the apostles; but with regard to St. Peter more particularly, it holds with peculiar force.

One of the most prominent features in the character of St. Peter, (a character most admirably portrayed by the evangelist) is timidity of disposition. We see it in the terror that seized him when he was walking on the sea; we see it in his deserting his divine Master when he was apprehended; then turning back to follow him, but following at a distance; not daring to go into the council-chamber when he was examined, but staying in the outer court with the servants; and at length, when he was challenged as one of his disciples, denying three times with the most dreadful oaths and imprecations that he knew any thing of him, or had the slightest connexion with him.

This is the point of view in which St. Peter presents himself to us just before our Lord's crucifixion.

Turn now to the fourth chapter of the Acts, and see what his language *then* was, after Jesus had actually been put to death.

He and John, having healed the lame man whom they found sitting at the gate of the temple, were apprehended, and thrown into prison, and the next day were called upon to answer for their conduct before the high priest, and the other chief rulers of the Jews. And upon being questioned by what power and by what name they had performed this miraculous cure, Peter answered them in these resolute terms: “Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, if we be this day examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole, be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought by you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other. For there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved*.” And when, soon after this, Peter and John were straitly threatened, and commanded not to speak at all, or teach, in the name of Jesus, they answered and said unto them, “Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you rather than unto God, judge ye: for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard †.”

What now is this that we hear? Is this the man who, but a short time before, had shamefully renounced his divine Master, and declared, with the utmost vehemence and passion, that he was utterly unknown

* Acts iv. 8, 12.

† Acts iv. 13, 20.

to him? And does this same man now, after the crucifixion of his Lord, and when he himself was a prisoner, and had reason to expect a similar fate, does this man boldly tell those in whose power he was, that by the name of this very Jesus he had healed the lame man? Does he dare to reprove them with having crucified the Lord of life? Does he dare to tell them that God had raised him from the dead; that there was no other name under heaven by which they could be saved; and that, in defiance of all their interdictions and all their menaces, he must and would still continue to speak what he had seen and heard?

In what manner shall we account for this sudden and astonishing alteration in the language of St. Peter? There is, I will venture to assert, no other possible way of accounting for it, but from that very circumstance which St. Peter himself mentions in his speech to the high priest, namely, “that he whom they had crucified was, by the almighty power of God, raised from the dead*.” It was this change in the condition of his divine Master, which produced a correspondent change in the character and conduct of St. Peter. It was this miracle of our Lord’s resurrection, which could alone have produced the almost equally astonishing miracle of St. Peter’s complete transformation. Had Jesus never risen from the dead, as he had repeatedly promised to do, he would have been a deceiver and an imposter; and that St. Peter, knowing this, should openly and boldly profess himself his disciple when *dead*, after having most peremptorily denied him and disclaimed all knowledge of him when *living*, and should expose himself to the most dreadful dangers in asserting a fact which he knew to be false,

* Acts iv. 10.

and for the sake of a man who had most cruelly deceived and disappointed him, is a supposition utterly repugnant to every principle of human nature, and every dictate of common sense, and an absurdity too gross for the most determined infidel to maintain.

We have here then one more proof, in addition to all the rest, of the resurrection of Christ, intelligible to the lowest, and convincing to the most improved understanding. And that this was the great decisive fact which operated so surprising a revolution in the mind of St. Peter, is still farther confirmed by the stress which he himself laid upon it, in his answer to the high priest, and by the constant appeal which he and all the other apostles made to this argument, in preference to every other; for we are told, that, “with great power gave the apostles witness of the *resurrection* of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all*.” And St. Paul goes so far as to make the belief of this single article the main ground and basis of our salvation: “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shall believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved †.” The reason of this is, because the belief of the resurrection of Christ unavoidably leads to the belief of the whole Christian religion, to the truth of which God set his seal, by raising the author of it from the dead; and the belief of the Christian revelation, if genuine and sincere, will, with the blessing of God on our own strenuous exertions, produce all those Christian graces and virtues, which, through the merits of our Redeemer, will render our final calling and election sure.

The resurrection of Christ being thus established on the firmest grounds, the conclusions to be drawn from

* Acts iv. 33.

† Rom. x. 9.

it are many and important : but I shall at present confine myself to two of them, which seem more particularly to deserve our notice.

The first is, that this great event of the resurrection affords a clear and decisive proof that Jesus was what he pretended to be, THE SON OF GOD; that the religion he taught came from God; that consequently every doctrine he delivered ought to be believed, every command he gave to be obeyed, and that every thing he promised or threatened will certainly come to pass. For had not his pretensions been well founded, and his religion true, it is impossible that the God of truth could have given them the sanction of his authority, by raising him from the dead. But by doing this, he gave the strongest possible attestation to the reality of his divine mission.

The next inference from this fact is, that the resurrection of Christ is an earnest, a pledge, and a proof of our own. He had promised his disciples, “that where he was, there should they be also:” and the scriptures in numberless places assure us that we shall rise again from the grave, and become immortal. Now these promises receive the strongest confirmation from his resurrection, which shows, in the most striking and sensible manner, that our bodies are *capable* of being raised to life again, and that God will actually reanimate them, as he did that of Jesus. In this, our Saviour acted conformably to the spirit and genius of his religion, and to his constant method of teaching, which was, to instruct mankind by facts rather than by words. It was his intention (and thanks be to God that it was) that our faith should stand, not in the wisdom or eloquence of man, but in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power. He went about, therefore,

not only preaching the word, but doing good, doing good miraculously, making the principles and the evidences of his religion palpable to the senses of mankind. When John sent to know whether he was the expected Messiah or no, Jesus, instead of entering into a long and laboured proof of his divinity, took the more compendious and convincing way of proving his point, by performing in that instant many miraculous cures, and then referring the Baptist to what his messengers had seen and heard*. In the very same manner, in the present instance, the assurance he gave us of our resurrection was not speculative and argumentative, but practical and visible. A thousand objections might have been formed by the fashionable philosophers of that age against the possibility of restoring breath to a dead body, and raising it alive again from the grave. Our Lord could very easily have shown, by unanswerable arguments, the futility and absurdity of any such objections. But the disputers of this world would have cavilled and objected without end. And therefore to put an effectual stop to all such idle controversy, and to convince all the world that it was not a thing *incredible* that God should raise the dead, he himself rose again from the grave, and became the first fruits of them that slept. He triumphed over death, he threw open the gates of everlasting life: and whoever treads in his steps as nearly as they can through life, shall follow him through death into those blessed regions, where he is gone before to prepare a place for such as love and imitate him. “For if the Spirit of him who raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you †.”

* Matt. xi. 4.

† Rom. viii. 11.

Since then we have such expectations and such hopes; what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness? The ancient heathen might say, the unbelieving libertine may still say, Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die; let us enjoy, without reserve, and without measure, all the pleasures which this world affords, for to-morrow we may leave it, and we know of no other. But how absurd would it be for the *Christian* to say this, how mad would it be for him to act accordingly, when he knows, that though to-morrow his soul may be separated from his body, yet that they will be again united, and live for ever in a future state of existence! What an amazing difference does this fact make in our circumstances, and how inexcusable shall we be, if it does not produce a suitable difference in our conduct! Even the *possibility* of such an event must have a powerful influence over our minds and manners; what then must be the case when it amounts, as it does with every sincere believer in the gospel, to *absolute certainty*? With what cheerfulness shall we acquiesce under poverty and misfortunes, when we reflect that if we bear them patiently and hold fast our integrity, these light afflictions, which are but for a moment, shall work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory! With what indifference shall we contemplate the charms of wealth and power, with what horror shall we turn away from the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season, when we know that the one *may*, and the other most certainly *will*, cut us off from an eternal and invaluable inheritance!

Suppose yourselves for a moment in some foreign kingdom, where, after having been obliged to spend many years, you are at length suffered to return to

your own country. Suppose farther, that in this country you have left families that are infinitely dear to you, friends whom you exceedingly love and esteem, wealth and honours to the utmost extent of your wishes. When, with the most impatient longings after all these blessings, you set out upon your return to your native land, will any allurements that you meet with on the road tempt you from your main object? Will any accidental hardships or inconveniences deter you from pursuing your journey? Will you not break through all obstructions, resist all temptations, and press forward with alacrity and vigour towards your beloved home? And why then will you not seek your *heavenly* country with the same ardour and perseverance that you would your *earthly* one? You are all “strangers and pilgrims upon earth.” This world is not your home, though you are too apt to think it so. You belong to another city, you are subjects of a better kingdom, where infinitely greater joys await you than have been just described, or can by the utmost stretch of imagination be conceived. Every day you live, every moment you breathe, brings you nearer to this country; and the grave itself, dismal as it appears, is nothing more than the gate that leads you into it.

Conscious then of the dignity and importance of our high and heavenly calling, which renders us candidates for the kingdom of God, and heirs of immortality, let us persevere steadily and uniformly in our progress towards those celestial mansions which are prepared for all the faithful servants of Christ; where we shall be released from all the endless anxieties, the vain hopes, and causeless fears that now agitate and disquiet us, and shall, through the merits of our Redeemer,

be rewarded not merely with uninterrupted tranquillity and repose (the utmost felicity of the pagan elysium); not merely with a visionary posthumous reputation, which commences not till we are incapable of enjoying it; but with a crown of glory that fadeth not away, a *real* immortality in the kingdom of our Father and our God.

LECTURE XXIV.

MATTHEW XXVIII.

THE last Lecture ended with the history of our Lord's resurrection. The evangelist then proceeds to give a concise account of what passed after that great event had taken place.

“ Then (says he) the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain, where Jesus had appointed them*.”

By the eleven disciples he means the apostles, who, though originally twelve, were now reduced to eleven, by the defection and death of Judas. These Jesus had commanded to meet him in Galilee. “ Go, tell my brethren, (says he to the women) that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.” There therefore the apostles went about eight days after the resurrection, and many others with them; for this probably was the time and the place when he showed himself to about five hundred brethren at once. “ And when they saw him they worshipped him; but some doubted.” Here we have the authority of the apostles themselves for the worship of Christ. The women, when they first saw Jesus, paid him the same adoration: “ they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him†.” But some, it is added, doubted. And where can be the

* Matt. xxviii. 16.

† Matt. xxviii. 9.

wonder, if among five hundred persons there should be two or three, who, like the disciples mentioned by St. Luke*, believed not for joy, and wondered; that is (as is very natural) were afraid to believe what they so ardently wished to be true; or who, like St. Thomas, would not believe, unless they touched the body of Jesus, and thrust their hands into his side. But their doubts, like his, were probably soon removed. This circumstance therefore only serves to show the scrupulous fidelity of the sacred historians, who, like honest men, fairly tell you every thing that passed on this and on similar occasions, whether it appears to make for them or against them.

“ And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.”

In his divine nature he had this power from all eternity; but it was now to be exercised in his human nature also, which, from a state of humiliation, from *the form of a servant*, was soon to be exalted to the highest dignity, and placed at the right hand of God. Accordingly St. Paul informs us, that “ God raised our Lord from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but in that which is to come; and put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all†.” And again, in his Epistle to the Philippians, he says, that “ God has highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that

* Ch. xxiv. 41.

† Ephes. i. 20—23.

every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*.” In the same magnificent language he is spoken of in the book of Revelations: “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.” And again, “Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever†.”

Such is the dignity of the Lord and Master whom we serve; and such is that authority with which, in the two concluding verses of this chapter, he gives his last command to his apostles: “Go ye, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatever I have commanded you: and lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.”

The ceremony then by which our Lord’s disciples were to be admitted into his religion, was baptism. This was sometimes used by the Jews on the admission of proselytes, and by the heathens on initiation into their mysteries. But the baptism of Christians was to be accompanied with a peculiar form of words, which distinguished it from every other. They were to be baptized *in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost*. This form of words has accordingly been used in the Christian church from the earliest times down to the present; and is, as you all know, the mode of baptism adopted and constantly practised by the Church of England; and it is remarkable, not only on this account, but as being also one principal ground of a very distinguished doctrine of the gospel, and of the

* Philipp. ii. 9—11.

† Rev. v. 12, 13.

Church of England, the doctrine of the Trinity. For the plain and natural interpretation of the words is, that by being baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, we are dedicated and consecrated equally to the service of each of those three divine persons; we are made the servants and disciples of each, and are consequently bound to honour, worship, and obey each of them equally. This evidently implies an equality in their nature; "that all the fulness of the Godhead dwells in each." In confirmation of this, we find in various parts of Scripture, that all the attributes of divinity are ascribed to each. And yet, as the unity of the Supreme Being is every where taught in the same Scriptures, and is a fundamental article of our religion, we are naturally led to conclude with our church in its first article, "That there is but one living and true God, of infinite power and wisdom, the maker and preserver of all things visible and invisible; and that, in the unity of this Godhead, there are three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

That this is a very mysterious doctrine we do not deny; but it is not more so than many other doctrines of the Christian revelation, which we all admit, and which we cannot reject without subverting the foundation, and destroying the very substance and essence of our religion. The miraculous birth and incarnation of our blessed Lord, his union of the human nature with the divine, his redemption of mankind, and his expiation of their sins by his death upon the cross: these are doctrines plainly taught in Scripture, and yet as incomprehensible to our finite understandings as the doctrine of three persons and one God. But what we contend for in all these instances is, that these myste-

ries, although confessedly *above* our reason, are not *contrary* to it. This is a plain and a well-known distinction, and in the present case an incontrovertible one. No one, for instance, can say, that the supposition of three persons and one God is contrary to reason. We cannot, indeed, *comprehend* such a distinction in the divine nature; but unless we knew *perfectly* what that nature is, it is impossible for us to say that such a distinction may not subsist in it consistent with its unity. The truth is, on a subject where we have no clear ideas at all, our reasoning faculties *must* fail us, and we must be content to submit (as well we may) to the clear and explicit declarations of holy writ. It is, indeed, natural for the human mind to wish that every thing in religion should be intelligible and plain, and that there should be no difficulties to perplex and stagger our faith. But natural as this wish may be, is it a reasonable one? Do we find that in the most important concerns of the present life, in those where our most essential interests, our property, our welfare, our health, our reputation, our very life, are at stake, that no difficulties, no perplexities, no intricacies occur; that every thing is plain and level before us, and that we are never at a loss how to act, what opinion to form, or what course to take? There are few, I fancy, here present, whose experience has not taught them, to their cost, the very reverse of all this. If then, even in the ordinary affairs of life, there is so much difficulty, doubt, and obscurity, how can we wonder to find it in religion also, in those inquiries that relate to an invisible world and an invisible Being, “to the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity*?”

* “So far is it from being true (as some one has said) that where mystery begins, religion ends, that religion, even natural religion, *begins* with a mystery,

And let it never be forgotten, that mysteries are not (as is often insinuated, and often taken for granted) peculiar to the Christian religion. They belong to *all* religions, even to that which is generally supposed to be of all others the least encumbered with difficulties, pure deism; or, as it is sometimes called, the religion of nature, of reason, or of philosophy.

Who, for instance, can grasp with the utmost stretch of his understanding, the idea of an Eternal Being; of a Being whose existence never had any beginning, and never will have an end? Where is the man whose thoughts are not lost and confounded in contemplating the immensity of a God who is intimately present to every part of the universe; who sees, with equal clearness, a kingdom perish and a sparrow fall, and to whom every thought of our hearts is perfectly well known*?

Who can reconcile that foreknowledge of future and contingent events, which is an unquestionable attribute of the Almighty, with that free will and free agency,

with the greatest of all mysteries, the self-existence and eternity of God. Let any one tell us how an eternity can be past, unless it was once present, and how that can be once present which never had a beginning." Seed's Sermons, v. ii. S. 7. 459.

* " J'aperçois Dieu partout dans ses œuvres. Je le sens en moi, je le vois tout autour de moi; mais sitôt que je veux le contempler en lui même, sitôt que je veux chercher où il est, ce qu'il est, quelle est sa substance, il m'échappe, & mon esprit troublé n'aperçoit plus rien. Rousseau, v. viii. p. 32. Enfin plus je m'efforce de contempler son essence infinie, moins je la conçois; *mais elle est*, cela me suffit; moins je la conçois, plus je l'adore.

I have cited these fine passages from the eloquent Rousseau in his own language (for no translation can do justice to them) because no arguments are so convincing as those which are drawn from the concessions of sceptics themselves, which fall from them incidentally and undesignedly; and because the sentiments here quoted stand in direct contradiction to that writer's cavils in other places against the Christian mysteries. For if, notwithstanding the difficulties which attend the contemplation of the Deity himself, he firmly believes his existence, on what ground can he make his Savoyard vicar doubt the truth of the gospel on account of its mysteries?—V. viii. p. 93.

which are no less unquestionable properties of man? Who, in fine, can account, on the principles of mere natural religion, for the introduction of natural and moral evil into the works of a benevolent Creator, whose infinite goodness must necessarily incline him to intend the happiness of all his creatures?

These considerations may serve to show, and it might be shown in various other cases, that it is in vain to expect an exemption from difficulty and mystery in any religion whatever. The real truth is, that not only the religion of nature, but the philosophy of nature, the works of nature, the whole face of nature, are *full* of mystery; we live and move in the midst of mystery*. And if, to avoid this, we have recourse to atheism itself, even that will be found to be more encumbered with difficulties, and to require a greater degree of *faith* than all the religions in the world put together.

Let not then the mysteries of the gospel ever be a rock of offence to you, or in any degree shake the constancy of your faith. They are inseparable from any religion that is suited to the nature, to the wants, and to the fallen state of such a creature as man. When once we are convinced that the Scriptures are the word of God, we are then bound to receive with implicit submission, on the sole authority of that word, those sublime truths, which are far beyond the reach of any finite understanding, but which it was natural and reasonable to expect in a revelation pertaining to that incomprehensible Being whose “greatness is unsearch-

* This, M. Voltaire himself acknowledges; and it is a complete answer to all the objections he has made in various parts of his works to the mysteries of Revelation. See *Questions sur L'Encyclopedie*. Art. *Ame*.

“The whole intellectual world is full of truths *incomprehensible*, and yet *incontestible*. Such is the doctrine of the existence of God, and such are the mysteries admitted in *Protestant* communions.”—Rousseau, v. ii. p. 15.

able, and whose ways are past finding out." Let us not, in short, "exercise ourselves too much and too curiously, in great matters, which are too high for us, but refrain our souls, and keep them low*." Laying aside all the superfluity of learning, and all the pride of human wisdom, let us hold fast the profession of our faith, without wavering, and without cavilling at what we cannot comprehend. Let us put ourselves without reserve, into the hands of our heavenly Guide, and submit with boundless confidence to his direction, who, as he died to save us, will certainly never mislead us. Since we *know* in whom we believe; since we know that the author of our religion is the son of God, let us never forget that this gives him a right, a divine right, to the obedience of our understandings, as well as to the obedience of our will. Let us therefore resolutely beat down every bold imagination, every high thing that exalteth itself against the mysterious truths of the gospel; bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ, and receiving "with meekness the ingrafted word, which is able to save our souls †."

Yet, however firmly we may believe all the great essential doctrines of the gospel, this alone will not ensure our salvation, unless to our faith we add obedience to all the laws of Christ. This we are expressly told in the concluding verse of this chapter. After our Lord had prescribed to his disciples the form of words to be used in baptism, he adds, "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." As this is the parting direction, the farewell injunction which Jesus left with his disciples just before he ascended into heaven, it shows what peculiar stress

* Psalm cxxxi. 2, 3.

† James i. 21.

he laid upon it. It shows that by making it the conclusion, the winding up as it were of his gospel, he meant to express, in the strongest manner, the indispensable necessity of a holy life resulting from a vital faith. He meant to intimate to his own disciples, and to the ministers of his gospel in every future age, that it was to be one principal object of their instructions and exhortations to inculcate all the virtues of a Christian life, and an unreserved obedience to all the precepts of their divine Master. And whoever neglects this branch of his duty, is guilty of manifesting a marked contempt of the very last command that fell from the lips of his departing Lord.

The few words that follow this command, and which conclude the gospel of St. Matthew, contain a promise full of consolation, not only to the apostles themselves, but to all the ministers of the gospel in every succeeding age. “And, lo, says our blessed Lord, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” That is, although I am now about to leave you and ascend into heaven, and can no longer be personally present with you, yet the Holy Spirit, whom I have repeatedly promised to send unto you, shall certainly come to supply my place, shall constantly abide with you, and shall enlighten, guide, assist, support, and comfort you to the end of the world.

Here ends the gospel of St. Matthew. But it must be observed, that in this last part of our Saviour’s history, he has been much more concise than the other evangelists, and has passed over several circumstances which they have recorded, and of which it may be proper to take some notice here, before we close this Lecture. It appears from the other evangelists, and from the Acts of the Apostles, that Jesus continued

among his disciples for forty days after his resurrection, giving them repeated and infallible proofs of his being actually raised from the dead, and “ speaking to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God *.”

In one of these discourses, he took occasion to advert more particularly to those things that were written in the law of Moses and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning him. He showed how exactly and minutely all the predictions respecting him, contained in those sacred books, were accomplished in his birth, his life, his doctrines, his sufferings, his death, and his resurrection.

This stamps at once a divine authority on those books, and gives a sanction to the interpretation of the passages alluded to, and the application of them to our blessed Lord, by our best and most learned expositors.

It is added, that on this occasion he *opened* their understandings, that they might understand the scriptures, and said unto them, “ Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and rise from the dead the third day: and that *repentance and remission of sins* should be preached in his name amongst all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”

He entered, we see, at large into the great evangelical doctrines of the atonement, of the redemption of mankind by his death, of the resurrection, of repentance, and the remission of sins through faith in his name. These are most important topics, and his illustration of them to his disciples must have opened to them an invaluable treasure of divine knowledge. And as these doctrines are but briefly touched upon

* Luke xxiv. 44. Acts i. 3.

in the gospels, and more fully unfolded and explained in the Acts and the Epistles, it is highly probable that a very considerable part, if not the whole of what passed in these discourses of our Lord to his disciples after his resurrection, is faithfully preserved and detailed in those inspired writings. This places in a very strong light the high importance of those writings, and the high rank they ought to hold in our estimation, as forming an essential part of the Christian system, and completing the code of doctrines and of duties contained in that divine revelation.

It is remarkable also, that St. Matthew has made no mention of the concluding act of our Lord's life on earth, his ascension into heaven. The reason of this omission is not perhaps very easy to assign, nor is it necessary. We know, that in several other instances various circumstances are omitted by one evangelist which are supplied by the rest, and others passed over by those which are noticed by the former; a plain proof by the way that they did not write in concert with each other, but each related his own story, and selected such facts and events as appeared to him most deserving of notice.

In the present case it is sufficient for our satisfaction that the ascension is related by two of the evangelists, St. Mark and St. Luke. The latter of these tells us in his gospel, and in the Acts, that "Jesus led out his apostles (and the disciples that were with them) to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands and blessed them. And it came to pass while he blessed them, he was parted from them and carried up into heaven, and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly towards heaven, as he went up, behold two men stood by them in white apparel;

which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God *.”

The last observation I have to make is, that neither St. Matthew, nor any other of the evangelists, have given us a full and complete history of every thing that our Saviour did during the whole course of his ministry; but have only recorded the most important and the most remarkable of his transactions and his miracles. Beside, therefore, the many irresistible proofs we already possess of his divine wisdom and almighty power, there are many others still remaining behind, which might have been produced, but which the evangelists did not think it necessary to specify; for St. John, in the 20th chapter of his gospel, makes this remarkable declaration: “Many other signs truly (says he) did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name.” God grant that this effect may be produced on all who now hear me; otherwise my labours, and their attendance, will have been in vain!

I HAVE now brought these Lectures to a conclusion, and must here take my final leave of you. It was my original intention and my wish to have proceeded next

* Luke xxiv. 50—51. Acts i. 9—11.

to the Acts of the Apostles, which contain the history of the first propagation of the Christian religion, and the astonishing progress it made through a large part of the world, by the preaching of the apostles and their coadjutors, after our Lord's departure into heaven: but I must not now venture into so large a field. Circumstanced as I am, it would be presumption in me to expect either that God would grant me time to accomplish so arduous a work, or that you would have perseverance to bear with me to the conclusion. I must here therefore close my labours, at least in this place; and must now, for the last time, implore you to think and to meditate again and again on the important and interesting truths which have been unfolded to you in the course of these Lectures, and to form them into principles of action, and rules of conduct, for the regulation and direction of the remaining part of your lives.

In the history of our Lord, as given by St. Matthew, of which I have detailed the most essential parts, such a scene has been presented to your observation as cannot but have excited sensations of a very serious and very awful nature in your minds. You cannot but have seen that the divine Author of our religion is, beyond comparison, the most extraordinary and most important personage that ever appeared on this habitable globe. His birth, his life, his doctrines, his precepts, his miracles, his sufferings, his death, his resurrection, his ascension, are all without a parallel in the history of mankind. He called himself the Son of God, the Messiah predicted in the prophets, the great Redeemer and Deliverer of mankind, promised in the sacred writings, through successive ages, almost from the foundation of the world. He supported these great characters with uniformity, with consistence,

and with dignity, throughout the whole course of his ministry. The work he undertook was the greatest and most astonishing that can be conceived, and such as before never entered into the imagination of man. It was nothing less than the conversion of a whole world from the grossest ignorance, the most abandoned wickedness, and the most sottish idolatry, to the knowledge of the true God, to a pure and holy religion, and to faith in him, who was THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE. He proved himself to have a commission from Heaven, for those great purposes, by such demonstrations of divine wisdom, power, and goodness, as it is impossible for any fair and ingenuous and unprejudiced mind to resist. Of all this you have seen abundant instances in the course of these Lectures; and when all these circumstances are collected into one point of view, they present such a body of evidence, as must overpower by its weight all the trivial difficulties and objections that the wit of man can raise against the divine authority of the gospel.

Consider, in the first place, the transcendent excellence of our Lord's character, so infinitely beyond that of every other moral teacher; the gentleness, the calmness, the composure, the dignity, the integrity, the spotless sanctity of his manners, so utterly inconsistent with every idea of enthusiasm or imposture; the compassion, the kindness, the tenderness he expressed for the whole human race, even for the worst of sinners, and the bitterest of his enemies; the perfect command he had over his own passions; the temper he preserved under the severest provocations; the patience, the meekness, with which he endured the cruellest insults, and the grossest indignities; the fortitude he displayed under the most excruciating torments; the

sublimity and importance of his doctrines; the consummate wisdom and purity of his moral precepts, far exceeding the natural powers of a man born in the humblest situation, and in a remote and obscure corner of the world, without learning, education, languages, or books. Consider further the minute description of all the most material circumstances of his birth, life, sufferings, death, and resurrection, given by the ancient prophets many hundred years before he was born, and exactly fulfilled in him, and him only; the many astonishing miracles wrought by him in the open face of day, before thousands of spectators, the reality of which is proved by multitudes of the most unexceptionable witnesses, who sealed their testimony with their blood, and was even acknowledged by the earliest and most inveterate enemies of the gospel. Above all, consider those two most remarkable occurrences in the history of our Lord, which have been particularly enlarged upon in these Lectures, and are alone sufficient to establish the divinity of his person and of his religion; I mean his wonderful prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, with every minute circumstance attending it; and that astonishing and well authenticated miracle of his resurrection from the grave, which was in the last Lecture set before you: and when you lay all these things together, and weigh them deliberately and impartially, your minds must be formed in a very peculiar manner indeed, if they are not most thoroughly impressed with faith in the Son of God, and the gospel which he taught.

Taking it then for granted that you firmly believe the scriptures to be the word of God, that of course they contain those heavenly doctrines and rules of life by

which you are to be guided here and saved hereafter; that the present scene is nothing more than a state of trial and probation for another world; that all mankind must rise from the grave, and stand before the judgement-seat of Christ, to receive from his lips their final doom; and that there is NO OTHER NAME GIVEN UNDER HEAVEN BY WHICH YOU CAN BE SAVED, BUT THAT OF JESUS ONLY; no other possible way of escaping the punishments or obtaining the rewards of the Christian covenant, but faith in Christ, reliance on his merits, and an earnest endeavour to practise every virtue and fulfil every duty prescribed in his gospel; taking it for granted that you believe all these things to be true, let me then ask you, what is the course of life which every wise man, which every man of common sense, must feel himself irresistibly called upon to pursue? Is it possible that with such awful, such divine truths as these deeply impressed upon your souls, you can allow yourselves to be so entirely occupied with the various pursuits of this life as to exclude, I will not say all *thought* (for that is impossible) but all serious solicitude concerning your future and eternal destiny? Are there any delights that this world has to offer that can compensate for the loss of heaven? Some of you have perhaps run your career of power, of pleasure, of gaiety, of luxury, of glory, and of fame, and can tell the true amount, the real value of these enjoyments. Say then, honestly, whether any one of them has answered your expectations; whether they have left your minds perfectly content and satisfied; whether they have proved so solid, so durable, so perfect, as to be worth purchasing at the expense of eternal happiness? I will venture to abide by your answer. Trust then to your

own experience, and be no longer the dupes of illusions which have so long misled you. And if you have any feeling, any pity for the young, the thoughtless, and the inexperienced, let them profit by the instructions, the salutary lessons you are so well qualified to give them; let your *warning voice* restrain them from rushing headlong into those errors, into which you have perhaps been unfortunately betrayed. Tell them (for you know it to be true) that whatever flattering prospects the world may present to their ardent imaginations at their first entrance into life, there is no solid ground for permanent comfort and content of mind, but a conscientious discharge of their duty to God and man, an anxious endeavour to recommend themselves to the favour of the Almighty, and a hope of pardon and acceptance through the merits of their Redeemer. These alone can smooth the path of life and the bed of death; these alone can bring a man peace at the last.

Reflections such as these must, in all times, and under all circumstances, operate most powerfully on every considerate mind; but they receive tenfold weight from the peculiar complexion of the present period and the awful situation into which, by the dispensations of Providence, we are now cast. Never since the world began were such tremendous proofs held up to the observation of mankind, of the slender and precarious tenure on which we hold every thing that we deem most valuable in the present life, as have been of late presented to our view. Look around you for a moment; consider what has been passing on the continent of Europe for the last ten years, and then say what is there left for you in this world worthy of your attention, on the possession of which, for any

length of time, you can with any degree of security rely? You must have been very inattentive observers indeed, not to have perceived that all the great objects of human wishes, rank, power, honour, dignity, fame, riches, pleasures, gaieties, all the pomp, and pride, and splendour, and luxury of life, may, when you least think of it, contrary to all expectation and all probability, be swept away from you in one moment, and you yourselves thrown as it were a miserable wreck on some desert shore, not only without the elegancies and the comforts, but even without the common necessities of life. That this is no imaginary representation, you all know too well; you see too many melancholy proofs of it in those unfortunate exiles who have taken refuge in this country; many of whom have experienced, in the utmost extent, the very calamities I have been here describing; and who, but a few years ago, had as little reason to expect such a dreadful reverse of fortune as any one who now hears me.

It is true, indeed, that hitherto we have been most wonderfully preserved by a kind Providence from those miseries that have desolated the rest of Europe, and have maintained a noble, though a bitter conflict, during many years, for our religion, our liberty, our independence, our unrivalled constitution, and every thing that is dear and valuable to man. But it must at the same time be admitted, that we are still in a most critical and doubtful situation, and that our final success must principally depend on that to which we have a thousand times owed our preservation, the favour and protection of Heaven.

The rapid, the astonishing, the unexampled vicissitudes, which have repeatedly taken place during the whole of this arduous contest, most clearly show that

there is something in it more than common, something out of the ordinary course of human affairs, something which baffles all conjecture and all calculation, and which all the wisdom of man cannot comprehend or control. What then *is* this something, what *is* this secret and invisible agent which so evidently overrules every important event in the present convulsive state of the world, and so frequently confounds the best-concerted projects and designs? Is it fate, is it necessity, is it chance, is it fortune? These, alas! we all know are mere names, are mere unmeaning words, by which we express our total ignorance of the true cause. That cause *can* be nothing else than the hand of that Omnipotent Being, who first created and still preserves the universe; who is, “the governor among the nations, and ruleth unto the ends of the earth.” To make *Him* then our friend is of the very last importance; and it highly behoves us to consider whether we have hitherto taken the right way to make him so. The answer to this question is, I fear, to be found in the unfavourable aspect of affairs abroad, and the severe distresses arising from unpropitious seasons at home, which too plainly show that the hand of the Almighty is upon us; that we are a sinful people, and He an offended God*.

Let it not, however, be imagined that I am here holding the language of despondency and despair; no, nothing can be farther from my thoughts. But in the present calamitous situation of this country, this glorious and still unrivalled country, to which all our hearts are bound by a thousand indissoluble ties, it would have been unpardonable in me to have passed over, with unfeeling apathy and cold indifference, those awakening and unexampled events which are forcing

* This Lecture was given in the Spring of the year 1801.

themselves every moment on our observation, and which call aloud on all the sons of men to reflect and to repent. I felt it to be my indispensable duty, in this my last solemn address to you, to press upon you every motive to a holy life that could influence the heart of man, and with this view to draw your attention to all those astonishing scenes that are daily passing before your eyes, and which add irresistible force to every thing that has been advanced in the course of these Lectures. You now see displayed, in visible characters, in the actual vicissitudes of almost every hour, those great truths which I have been for four years past inculcating in words; the uncertainty of every earthly blessing, the vanity of all human pursuits, the instability of all worldly happiness, and the absolute necessity of looking out for some more solid ground to stand upon, some more durable treasures on which to fix our affections and our hearts. For many years past, God has been speaking to us by the various dispensations of his providence, by acts of mercy and of justice, by his interpositions to save us, by his judgements to correct us. He has been speaking a language which cannot be misunderstood, a language which is heard in every quarter of the globe, which makes all nature tremble, and shakes the very foundations of the earth.

Yet still, though there is just cause for apprehension, there is no occasion for despair. If from these judgements of the Lord we learn that lesson they were meant to teach us; if we turn, without delay, from the evil of our ways; if we humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, and acknowledge our transgressions with the truest penitence and contrition of soul; if we set ourselves in earnest to relinquish every vicious habit,

every secret fault, as well as every presumptuous sin; if we deny ourselves, and take up our cross to follow Christ; if we lay our follies, our vanities, our gaieties, our criminal indulgences, at the feet of our Redeemer, and purify ourselves even as he is pure; if in these times of unexampled scarcity of all the necessaries of life, we open our hearts and our hands wide to the necessities of our suffering brethren; if, in short, by the purity of our hearts, the sanctity of our lives, the fervour of our devotions, the sincerity of our faith and confidence in Christ, we recommend ourselves to the favour of Heaven, I scruple not to say, that we have nothing to fear. By the mighty hand of God we shall be protected here; by the merits of him who died for us we shall be saved and rewarded hereafter. And we may, I trust, in this case, humbly apply to ourselves that consolatory declaration of the Almighty to another people, with which I shall finally close these Lectures; and which may God of his infinite mercy confirm to us all in this world, and in the next!

“How can I give thee up, Ephraim? My soul is turned within me. I will not execute the fierceness of my anger; I am God and not man*. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness † will I have mercy on thee ‡.”

* Hosea, xi. 8, 9.

† This *kindness* has in fact (as far as the public welfare is concerned) been in several important instances most graciously and conspicuously extended to this highly-favoured land since these lectures were finished; and it evidently calls for every return, on our part, of affection and obedience to our heavenly Benefactor, that the deepest sense of gratitude can possibly dictate to devout and feeling hearts. March, 1802.

‡ Isaiah, liv. 8.

THE END.



